

WRITINGS OF ASHTON OXENDEN

by Ashton Oxenden

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Ashton Oxenden, compiled for study and devotional reading.

55 Chapters

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01.00. A Happy Old Age

A Happy Old Age

Or, Home Beyond!

Ashton Oxenden, 1870

01.01. Life's Journey

Life's Journey

What is our life? Life is a Journey, that is soon ended. Life is a Tale, that is quickly told. Life is a Day, whose hours roll by apace. Life is a Vapor, which rises for a while, and then vanishes. Life is a Flame, that burns for a moment or two, and then flickers, and shortly goes out. Our little lifetime — oh, how short it is! And what are your thoughts, my aged friend, about this journey of life? Once you looked upon it as a very different thing from what it appears to you now. Once it seemed to you as if the days of your childhood would never pass away. You longed for manhood or womanhood; but it came very slowly. The early stages of your journey seemed almost endless. And if it had been possible, you would willingly have taken a jump, and sprang into middle life in one bound. But now you look back, and wonder how quickly your life has passed. It seems but yesterday, that you were a child. Old age has crept on, almost without your knowing it.

Truly the longest life is but a little while — when compared with eternity. It is but a tiny drop in the wide ocean; but as a grain of sand on the boundless shore! Life soon passes it away — and we are gone forever! And when we look forward — how soon shall we be in our graves! A few more days — and we shall come to the end of our little span. Very soon the silver cord will be severed, the golden bowl will be broken — and our dust will return to the ground it came from, and our spirit will return to God who gave it. Then we will go to our eternal home and mourners go about the streets! (Ecclesiastes 12:5-6.) Now, I want you to carefully ponder the Ninetieth Psalm:

1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.

2 Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

3 You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men."

4 For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.

5 You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning —

6 though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.

7 We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation.

8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.

9 All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan.

10 The length of our days is seventy years — or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.

11 Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.

12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

13 Relent, O Lord! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants.

14 Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

15 Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.

16 May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.

17 May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us — yes, establish the work of our hands.

Take it, and ponder it over in your heart; and I think you will find it very profitable sometimes to use it as a prayer for yourself. It is not certain who was the writer of that Psalm. But whoever wrote it must, I think, have been an old man; and he must have written it on purpose for those of his brethren who are going down the hill of life.

I once heard of an aged Christian, who used to be very fond of applying the Ninety-first Psalm to himself. He loved to think how truly it set forth the faithfulness of God to him during his long life. When he was on his death-bed, he exclaimed, in the words of the last verse; 'With long life has He satisfied me; and now I am going to enjoy the only portion which I could not have in this life — He is going to show me His salvation.'

Perhaps, dear reader, you are drawing to the close of a long life. It may be that your thoughts have long been turned heavenwards. And if so, I know that a word of counsel will be welcome to you. But if, on the other hand, you have been thoughtless hitherto, I will try and make you thoughtful now. Whatever has been your past history, I want to give you in this book a few hints as to how you may turn to the best account, the time that still remains to you. I want to do you some good. I want to make your last days the best and happiest of all your life.

I observe that aged people are in some respects much alike — but in other respects are very different.

They are ALIKE in their infirmities. Their limbs shake and totter. Their bodies have grown weak. The clay house they dwell in, is the worse for wear. Their minds too have lost their former strength. Memory fails them. They can recollect what happened years and years ago; but what happened yesterday is gone — all is as a blank.

They are alike too in their sorrows. They have known what affliction is. Some have had to mourn over thoughtless, and undutiful, and rebellious children. Some have had to weep over many an open grave. Some have found, from sad experience, that the world is but a sorry house to live in. In these respects, aged people are much alike. But in other respects, how DIFFERENT they are! Some are rich — while others are poor. Some have but few cares and troubles in their declining years — while others are burdened with anxieties. Some again have many friends around them, who show them kindness — while others are left alone with no one to care for them. But there is a still greater difference between those who are far advanced in years. Here is one stooping and

groaning under his heavy burden — vexed with all around him — full of complainings — discontented with his lot — having no pleasure in life, and yet clinging to it as a drowning man grasps at the only plank that is left — tired of this world, and yet having no hope beyond it.

We see another with the same grey head, and the same bent body; but there is a beam that lights up his aged countenance. He is thankful, contented, peaceful. All goes well with him. He is willing — cheerfully willing — to bear all that God lays upon him. Not a murmur escapes his lips; not a distrustful feeling dwells within. There is a calm tide of joy flowing through his soul.

How is this? What makes all this difference? It is God's grace alone. This fills the heart with peace. This gives comfort and rest now, and awakens in the soul a sweet and blessed hope of joys to come.

Such an old age as this is most desirable, is it not? And such an old age, dear reader — is just what I desire for you. May it be your portion.

I once heard of an old man, who was brought to God late in life. He desired that, when he died, these words might be written on his tombstone: 'Here lies an old man of seven years of age.' And why so? The truth was, that all the past years of his long life he counted as no life at all, for his soul was dead. It was only during the last few years that he had really lived, for he had then lived to God.

You are now grown old. The shadows of evening are growing thick around you. You are come to the last stage of life's journey. Your state is something like that of Moses, when he had traveled for forty years through the wilderness, and was now come to his journey's end. The Lord announces to him that his death is near. But before he departs, He bids him go up to the top of Mount Pisgah. There he was able to look back on the path along which he had been brought, and look forward to the Land of Promise.

It must have been very good for him to take a survey of that winding path along which God had led him — to cast his eye back upon the many spots where mercy had been shown him — to call to mind all the difficulties and dangers he had passed through, and the gracious manner in which his God had borne with him, notwithstanding his many sins.

Now, this is just the survey which you should take, my aged friend. Get a quiet half-hour now and then, and look back into the past. It will be good for you, I am sure; and I counsel you to try it. I will help you to do so in the next chapter.

01.02. The Days That Are PAST

The Days That Are PAST

You remember that I spoke in my last chapter of what Moses did before he died. He was directed to go up on Mount Pisgah, and take a glimpse of that Promised Land which lay before him. But we can hardly imagine that this was all he did. It is more than likely that another purpose for which he ascended that high hill was, that he might from thence take a survey of all the way that he had already traveled in his wilderness journey. And I said that it would be well for you now and then, to look back on all the years that you have passed through. Let me now help you a little in doing this.

First take a good searching look, and see what sins have marked your past life. And, as you look back, you will feel, I dare say, that there is many an act which you would gladly blot out if you could. There are many days you would like to live over again, in the hope that you would live them better. There are many words you would like to recall. There are many a deed which you would give worlds to undo. There are many a bad thought which you fostered, and which has left a stain behind, that even time cannot wear out.

I know it is very painful to be thinking about our past sins; but we must not shrink from it. It is folly to deceive ourselves, and imagine that they have not been committed. There they are — and God sees them, if we will not. His eye marked them at the time, and it marks them still. They may almost have faded away from our memory; but God remembers them — He forgets nothing.

Aged people are very apt to imagine that what is past and forgotten by them — is also blotted out of the book of God's remembrance. Often for instance, when the sins and follies of their youth are spoken of, they just heave a passing sigh, and that is all. They think that such things are excusable in times of youth, and that God will not be extreme to mark what was done amiss in those days. They imagine that the bye-gone past will not be laid to their charge, as they have since become wiser and more thoughtful. But is it so? Is God such a one as ourselves? Can any length of time wear away our sins from His recollection? Is it not written that even 'for every idle word that men shall speak — they must give an account?'

I am sure it is very good for us all, and especially for those who are drawing near to the close of life, to look fairly at the sins that we have committed. It is folly to close our eyes upon them and persuade ourselves they do not exist. Indeed, if we have any spiritual life in us, whatever else we forget — surely we shall never forget those hateful sins which have defiled our souls. But it is not enough to look at them in a sort of general way. We must fix upon them one by one, and draw them forth from their hiding-places. There must be a close searching for them, as with a candle — an honest, hearty, diligent search, so that not one shall escape us.

'And what is the good of this?' you are perhaps ready to ask. Is there any use in making ourselves unhappy? The thing is already done — can it be undone?

Oh, surely it is far better to discover our sins now — than to have them brought to light for the first time when we appear before God. It is far better to know how we stand with God now — than to learn it in that world where there is no more hope for the sinner. And what are we to do with our sins when we have found them out? is there any way by which they can be gotten rid of? Or must they lie like dark spots on our souls — like unpaid debts which can never be cancelled? No, dear friend; no. There is a way — one only way — by which every sin committed, and every deed left undone, can be blotted out forever.

Christ has bled for sinners on the Cross. He has died that sinners might live. And He is able, at this moment, not only to pardon your every sin — but to cover you with His perfect righteousness, and to make you His forever; 'He is able to save to the uttermost, all who come unto God by him.

Go now to Jesus, and ask Him to give you repentance. Ask Him by His Holy Spirit to touch your heart — to make you hate your sins, and mourn over them with godly sorrow. Oh, it is good for us to feel grief for our sins. And depend upon it, we shall grieve over them, if we are brought under the power of God's grace. But remember, sorrow and tears will not wash out the stain of sin. They cannot remove one single atom of our guilt. No; it is only the sacrifice of Christ that can pay the debt. In Him alone forgiveness can be found. 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin.

Here, then, my dear friend, is the good of finding out our many sins. It is that we may get every one of them pardoned — it is that we may be made happy in Christ our Savior. He is all power and love. He is able and willing to save. He says, 'Come unto me, and I will give you rest!' 'Though your sins be as scarlet — they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson — they shall be as wool!' But there is something more we should look back upon, besides our sins; we should look back upon our many mercies.

Think of the numberless acts of love and kindness which God has shown you during the years that are past. Moses called to mind, I dare say, those forty years in which the Lord had so greatly blessed him. The whole path which he had trodden was indeed strewed with mercies — mercies to himself, to his family, to his people. We are told that for forty years their 'clothing did not wear out, neither did their feet swell.' When they were thirsty, 'He brought streams out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers.' When they were hungry, 'He fed them with bread from heaven.' He did not lead them by the shortest road, nor by the easiest path — but it was 'by the right way,' to their promised land. And has not the Lord dealt as graciously with you? Have not goodness and mercy followed you all your days? Think of your many deliverances from dangers. Think how you have been spared — while others have been cut off. Think of the many blessings which came to you — when you so little deserved it. Think of God's patience with you — when you provoked His anger. Think how He made one thing and another work round for your good. Many a time you said within yourself, 'This thing is unfortunate — it is all against me;' and perhaps that very thing turned out to be for your greatest good.

If you are a sincere Christian, God's past mercies should be a pledge to you, of those that are to come. You may well plead with David, 'O God, you have taught me from my youth: now when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not!'

You may expect further trials as you reach the remaining stages of the wilderness. But you may be sure that the manna with which you have been fed, will not fail; nor the cloud of protection which

has sheltered you, be withdrawn — until your wilderness wanderings are over. Be assured, God has never yet forsaken a worn-out Christian pilgrim. He never yet neglected an aged servant. You know that He has promised you, 'I will be your God throughout your lifetime — until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you!' The last words of good old Dr. Guyse were, 'O my God — you have always been with me, and will not leave me now.'

Think of all this, and it will warm your cold heart. You will find some love kindling within you, as you call to mind the goodness of that heavenly Friend, who has watched over you so lovingly, and cared for you from your childhood until now. And oh! if you are a true servant of God — if you have been brought to know and love your Savior — if the path of godliness has been your path — then is there not one mercy which out-tops every other in your case? Does not your heart throb with gratitude — when you think of that grace which called you out of darkness into the blessed light of God's truth, which turned your feet out of the path of sin and misery along which you were then hurrying, and brought you into the way of peace? Of all your mercies, there is none so great as that which led you to Christ and made you a partaker of His great salvation!

It is said of John Newton, that although his memory failed him in his old age, there were two things which he never forgot — one was, that 'he was a great sinner;' and the other was, that 'Jesus was a greater Savior!'

Let me urge you then, at once to take a look BACK on your past sins, and on your past mercies. This is especially needful for you who have lived many years in this world, and whose hour-glass has but a few grains yet to run out. Do so in a humble and thoughtful spirit, and I believe you will find that much good will come from it.

Take this, and any other counsels which I offer you, as coming from one who really cares for you. Yes, I feel for the aged. I know their trials, their infirmities, and their difficulties. But I also know that the Savior Himself cares for you. He has in store many and great blessings, which He is quite ready to bestow upon you. And what I desire, in this book, is to lead you to the enjoyment of them, so that yours may be a blessed and happy old age.

01.03. The DUTIES of Old Age

The DUTIES of Old Age

Every station and stage of life has its own special duties. Childhood has its duties; such as obedience to parents, modesty, willingness to be taught. A husband and wife have their duties. Adulthood has its duties; a grown-up man or woman are required to be useful in the world, and to live not unto themselves — but unto the Lord. And so too Old Age has its duties. I will mention some of them.

1. You should endeavor to be patient and gentle. Amidst all your pains and infirmities, how blessed if you can feel a cheerful submission to God's will, and if you can accept, not merely with resignation — but with actual thankfulness, all that He lays upon you. Now, God can give you this patient, humble, and submissive spirit, if you will earnestly and daily seek it from Him.
2. You should try to be cheerful and considerate of others. Sometimes old people are a little apt to dwell too much on their own troubles and needs. Guard against this; and seek to make those around you happy. You cannot do much, perhaps — but you can do something. A gentle word or two, or even a kind look, will cheer some and encourage others.

Little drops of water, little grains of sand, Make the boundless ocean, and the beautiful land. Little deeds of kindness, little words of love, Make our earth an Eden, like the heaven above. Do not begrudge young people those delights which you can no longer enjoy. But put yourself often in their place, and remember that you were once a child yourself. The very feeling that you are trying to make others happy — will make you happy yourself.

3. Be much in prayer and in the reading of God's Word. These are great helps to a Christian pilgrim; they are like so many strong staffs along the way. Use them diligently and they will help you onward. As you read a little further in this book, you will see some directions how to profit by the use of them.

4. You should sit loose to this world — and be in readiness to leave it. This, you will say, is the duty of us all. Yes — but it is especially your duty; for the clock of time seems now to be giving its warning sound in your ears. Every day seems now to be saying to you, 'Prepare to meet your God! The night is far spent; the day is at hand. The judge stands at the door!'

It is a melancholy sight to see an aged person bent down with years, standing at the edge of eternity — and yet unwilling to loose his hold of this world — clinging to it with an eager grasp — as much busied as ever with its trifling concerns — still thirsting for its poor pleasures, and yet unable to enjoy them — having no hope as regards eternity. Such an old age is indeed a sad one. But you will perhaps say, Surely when any one has grown old, and when he has sown the wild oats of youth, he will, as a matter of course, become thoughtful, and turn his mind towards that eternal world which he is so shortly to enter. But no; this does not at all follow. On the contrary, I have seen many in old age, just as worldly-minded as ever, and putting from them even then the

thoughts of a life to come.

Dear friend, it is only saving grace which can make you concerned about your never-dying soul. It is only grace which can prepare you for eternity. We all need the powerful working of God's Spirit to draw our minds from earth — to heaven; from sin — to holiness.

Happy for you, if heaven is the home of your heart! Happy for you if your thoughts are centered there! Happy for you, if you can say, 'The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world!' 'So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands!'

5. Your conversation should be heavenly. Your time on earth is nearly ended; and therefore you should not think much about this present world, which you are on the point of leaving. Its pleasures, its riches, its occupations — should not much occupy your mind. You should rather busy yourself about your journey to your everlasting home. You should love to speak about your Father's house.

True it is, that our poor hearts will ever be 'cleaving to the dust.' There is a weight upon our wings ever keeping us downwards. But oh, struggle against this. Pray against it. Ask God continually to be drawing your mind heavenward, and to enable you to 'set your affections on things above.' Speak thankfully of His preserving mercy. Bear testimony to His goodness and faithfulness. And recommend others to trust Him without a doubt, and to give their whole hearts to Him.

6. Try and set a good example to others. We should all wish to be useful in the world. But now that you are grown old, you feel perhaps that your time for usefulness is past. Satan may whisper, 'You are too old to be useful now!' But not so! You may do something still. It is true that you cannot labor for your family as you once did. You cannot go here and there to help those who need your assistance. But you may be very useful; yes, useful even now — useful if you are rich, and useful too if you are poor. As you sit by your fireside, you may speak Christian words, and you may show by your conduct and temper — the blessed effects that salvation has upon your heart. You may, by your prayers and praises, by your patience and perseverance, by your watching and waiting — glorify God. A Christian aged man or woman may thus be a great blessing to the house and place in which he is living. He may spread a feeling of contentment around him. He may check many a bad word, and soften down many a quarrelsome spirit. He may show forth so clearly the power of grace in his own conduct, that he may thereby lead others to seek it, and pray for it themselves.

Without speaking much, or doing much — you may honor God by your Christian conduct; and thus your light may so shine before men, that they may glorify Him. We know that a lovely picture in a room is a pleasant thing to gaze upon; we constantly turn to it with pleasure. And what picture is there more beautiful than that of an aged Christian — old in years, and ripe in grace? 'Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained by living a godly life.'

Yes, remember always you may do much by your example. This will be even more useful even than your words. For your words may be mistaken — but your life cannot be; it must and will speak. Paul reminded the Corinthians of this, when he said, 'You show that you are the epistles of Christ, known and read by everybody!' That is, your lives plainly declare whose and what you are.

These are some of the duties which belong to aged people. Dear reader, neglect them not, try to fulfill them. It will be for your own happiness — and for the good of others. Thus you will be 'bearing fruit in old age.' 'He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers!'

01.04. The TEMPTATIONS of Old Age

The TEMPTATIONS of Old Age

Satan tempts every one of us. Who is there that has not felt his power? And oh, how craftily does he apply his temptations! He suits them exactly to our stations and ages. He has some temptations for the rich, others for the poor; some for the young, and others for the aged. He knows our weak points — and there he assaults us! So you must not be surprised if you have your temptations, and perhaps sore ones too. You may be one of God's dearest children — and yet be tempted. Was not Joseph tempted, and David, and Paul? And was not even Jesus, the sinless Savior, tempted by Satan?

Neither, again, be angry with yourself because you are thus tried. It is no sin to be tempted. It is only when we yield to temptation, instead of resisting it — that offends God. It is the falling into sin that grieves and offends Him — not the mere being tempted by sin. When you find yourself tempted to any wrong feeling, or to do anything sinful, I will tell you how to act. Don't give yourself up to the temptation — but strive resolutely against it. And, as you have but little strength of your own — fly unto the Strong One, God for help. Turn at once to Him. Satan is strong; but there is a Stronger One than he. Jesus knows both Satan's power — and your weakness; and, as 'He himself has suffered, being tempted — he is able to help those who are tempted.' In Christ you are safe — and nowhere else. He can throw His shelter around you, and protect you from all harm. But let us see what KINDS of temptation belong especially to the aged. A deadness and dullness of soul is very apt to come over an aged person. Your feelings are not as lively and strong as they once were. Your affections are somewhat blunted. There was a time when a powerful sermon or a striking book moved you, and the tear started in your eye. The love of Jesus made your heart to glow. But perhaps this warmth and tenderness of spirit is in a measure gone.

Now, you have need to be on your guard on this point. Take care that you do not settle down into a cold and easy frame of mind. Take care that your faith does not wither, and your love grow dull. It will do so — if you are not very watchful. Pray constantly that God may touch your heart, and enliven it. Especially pray that you may have a bright view of that gracious Savior, who has done so much for you.

Very often, too, aged people give way to a peevish and irritable temper. They allow little things to ruffle them and annoy them. This is wrong, and it very much interferes with their happiness. When you yourself have indulged in this spirit — what has been the consequence? Why, you have felt thoroughly uncomfortable afterwards, and you have wished that you had more command over yourself.

Watch against it then. I know that it is one of the temptations to Which old age is especially liable. But God can strengthen you against it. He can enable you to overcome it — instead of its overcoming you. He can give you a happy, contented, peaceful frame of mind; and enable you to take all the little roughnesses of life — with calmness and evenness of temper. Thus will your latter

days be happy, instead of miserable; and you will enjoy a peace within, which nothing can rob you of!

Again there is such a thing as weariness of living, which it is very wrong to foster. At the end of sixty or seventy years, a person often feels a little tired of this world. He is weary of its trials. He has tasted of its disappointments. He wishes to get away from them. A suffering body too perhaps weighs him down. And he is ready to cry out with David, 'Oh, that I had wings like a dove! then would I fly away, and be at rest!' But this is not a holy wish. We ought cheerfully to bear all that our Heavenly Father sees it good for us to bear. Even our greatest sufferings — should be willingly endured for His sake. Christ could say in the very midst of His agony, 'The cup which my Father has given me — shall I not drink it?' Elijah was wrong when he requested that he might die, and said, 'Now, O Lord, take away my life!' Jonah, too, was wrong when he exclaimed, 'It is better for me to die, than to live!' There was a good deal of discontent in their minds, when they made such a request. It was in a moment of disappointment and distrust — that they breathed the unholy prayer.

How different were Paul's feelings when he expressed a 'desire to depart.' It was not because he was tired of life — or because he was discontented with the lot which God had appointed for him. No! He desired to depart for a far different reason. It was because he wished to be with Christ. He loved his Savior, and longed to be in His presence! May God give us the same holy longing! And may we at the same time be content to remain here — just so long as He in His wisdom and love sees fit. My dear friend, you see there are certain temptations to which in your old age you are especially liable. I have mentioned three — namely, deadness of soul, peevishness, and unwillingness to bear the sufferings of this life. But there are others which I have not noticed. Now, look well into your heart and think what is the temptation to which you are most inclined to yield. And then ask God to set you free from it, and to strengthen you. That was a comforting word which our Lord spoke to Peter, 'Satan has desired to have you, and sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith fail not.'

Satan is a mighty tempter; but you have also an almighty Protector. Rest in His promise; trust in His strength; and no power on earth or in hell can ever harm you!

01.05. The TRIALS of Old Age

The TRIALS of Old Age 'Here on earth — you will have many trials and sorrows!' John 16:33 This present life, is a life of trials! There are none who are altogether free from them! We must expect them, and be ready to meet them when they come. Sometimes they cluster so thickly around us, that it needs a stout heart and much grace — to bear them meekly, and to pass through them unhurt.

Let us talk over those trials which belong to old age; and perhaps we shall find ourselves all the better for saying a few words about them.

Loss of strength is a great trial to an old man or woman. It is painful to feel that you cannot do many things now — which you once did so easily. To be busy and happy — was once perhaps your greatest enjoyment. But now your old limbs can hardly carry you; and many of the routine tasks of life are a burden to you. But let not this distress you. It is your portion, and God has so ordered it. And though 'the outer man decays,' He can strengthen you in your soul, so that the 'inner man is renewed day by day.' And is there not mercy in your very feebleness? For it reminds you constantly that your life is drawing to a close, while a voice from heaven whispers to you that 'there remains a rest for the people of God!' In that Heavenly Home — there will be no weakness, no weariness, no infirmity, no sin!

Loss of memory is another great trial, which generally accompanies old age. I dare say you can remember pretty well what happened years ago; but what happened yesterday — you entirely forget. What you read is soon lost; it passes away like letters written on the sand. You hear a sermon — and what your minister said is all gone an hour after; even the very text is forgotten! It may be, that you are sometimes vexed with yourself for this; and you even fear that God may be angry with you. But not so! He is no hard master, He 'does not reap — where He has not sown.' He is quite aware of your infirmities! He knows very well — the weakness of your frame, and 'remembers that you are but dust.' He is too kind, and too just — to require of you what you cannot reasonably give Him.

Never mind then, your declining memory. God will not call you to account for that. The great thing is to have your heart right with God. Entreat Him to cleanse and purify that by His Holy Spirit — and then all will be well.

There is a third loss which aged people often have to mourn over, and that is the loss of dear friends and family members. One after another drops off into the grave — and they find themselves left behind like a solitary tree in the wilderness. Their dearest children have perhaps been taken from them; and it may be a lonely widowhood is their portion. Ah, there is something truly sad in all this. It is sad indeed, to see an aged one bereft of those who once clung to him with fond affection — and now left all alone. But, my dear friend, remember this: you will never be alone — if God is your God. Christ is the Friend, the Brother, the Husband of His people! Others may forsake you — but He never will. You may depend on His love — it will not fail you. He is with you

now — and He will never leave nor forsake you. If you can truly say, 'The Lord is my Shepherd;' then you may certainly add, 'Therefore I shall not want.'

Again, aged people often feel that they are only a trouble to others. This is a heavy trial to some. But why should it be so? It is the will of God that in infancy and old age — we would need others for help. And surely a son or a daughter ought to feel it not only a sacred duty — but also a pleasure, to supply the needs of an aged parent. And I am sure, where the heart is right, it will be done with real cheerfulness and goodwill.

There is one more trial which I will mention — the feeling of not being able to earn one's own livelihood. If a person has honestly supported himself and his family during a long life, he does not like to feel that he must be indebted to others in his latter days. Perhaps this is the case with you. Perhaps you laid aside some money in the days of your strength, and looked forward to maintaining yourself in old age. But you lent your money to a friend, and he has made off with it; or you had a long illness, and all your savings were spent during that time. And now you are forced to depend on the kindness of friends and family.

Well, if such is the case, you have no cause to blame yourself, and there is no disgrace whatever in being now a pensioner on others. Instead of such a feeling — you may well be thankful that there are ways in which you can be helped in the hour of your need. Look upon those who assist you — as sent by your Heavenly Father! He it is who graciously provides means for supplying your necessities. He raises up friends for you. He puts it into their hearts — to help you. He is the great Fountain from whence all your blessings flow.

Receive then every gift — as from God. Acknowledge His hand in it; and depend on Him from day to day for all you need. I believe that, if we thus trust God — we shall never be disappointed. We may sometimes be at our wits end. There may be but a little meal in our barrel, and but a few drops of oil in our cruse; but let us remember that word which comforted Abraham of old, 'Jehovah-jireh' — The Lord will provide! He who feeds the ravens — will feed you. He cares for His people, and will never let them starve. 'Once I was young,' (said David), 'and now I am old. Yet I have never seen the godly abandoned or their children begging for bread!'

I have mentioned some of your trials. And I dare say there are many more — many which the world knows nothing about, and which none will ever know but yourself. But however thick they fall around you, and however heavily they press upon you — you have only to carry them to God, and He will lighten your load, and make it easy to bear. He is your remedy. He has given you His promise, 'Cast your burden upon the Lord — and He will sustain you.' He will not only carry your burdens — but He will carry you. He who has so often laid you as a tender lamb in His bosom — will carry you now that you are old. 'He will carry the lambs in His arms, holding them close to His heart!' He will never turn away from you — but rejoice over you to do you good. He will be with you amidst all your infirmities. He will not only bring you to Jordan — but will carry you over it, and conduct you safely into the Promised Land! And then, too, remember that your trials are good for you. If we had none, we would be like a wild bull caught in a net; we would have our own way too much, and never learn submission to our Father's will. Our Lord suffered greatly — and shall not we? Suffering was His daily portion when on earth — let us not wish to escape it. As it is — we are tied and bound to this world far too much! We love it too well. And how would it be with us — if we met with no trials here on earth? We would be still less disposed than we now are — to look for

another resting place above!

Think too how light our trials are — compared with the Savior's. His was a storm of suffering; ours but a few drops.

Think also, for how short a time do our troubles, even the severest of them, last! They are 'but for a moment!' In eternity — how small they will seem to us, as we look back upon them! In heaven we shall thank God for them, for we shall then see how needful they were for us! 'For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory which far outweighs them all!'

Cheer up then, my fellow-Christian! Bear these trials of yours patiently, meekly, thankfully. Look upon them as the sick man does upon the remedies which are sent to do him good. Look upon them as the traveler does upon the rough rocks which serve as steps to bring him to his father's house.

Turn your trials into means of grace. Let them not be hindrances to you — but helps, on your way to heaven. Ask God to change them into blessings, and to make them useful to you. And just as, when Noah was in the ark, every wave which swelled only bore him up higher and higher towards heaven — so may every trial raise your soul above the world, and bring you nearer and nearer to God.

'God disciplines us for our good — that we may share in His holiness!' Hebrews 12:10 'Before I was afflicted I went astray — but now I obey Your Word.' Psalms 119:67 'It was good for me to be afflicted — so that I might learn Your decrees!' Psalms 119:71 'I know, O Lord, that in faithfulness You have afflicted me!' Psalms 119:75

01.06. The JOYS of Old Age

The JOYS of Old Age A happy old age! Is such a thing possible? Do we ever meet with an old, worn out person — who is really happy? Is the evening of life ever bright and sunny? Yes, such a thing is quite possible; and we now and then meet with a fine specimen of it! Though the body is decayed by time, though the limbs are feeble and the mind is somewhat weakened too — yet still there may be a calm joy within, and a deep peace which time can never wear out.

Dear friend — do you wish to be happy? I know you do; for everyone is a seeker after happiness; though many look for it in the wrong direction, and therefore never find it. Shall I tell you how and where to find happiness? The world cannot give it to you. It holds out large promises — but it has no peace to bestow. Friends cannot give it to you. It is a blessing to have kind friends, and to be surrounded by those who love us; but this cannot give peace to the conscience. Money cannot give it to you. It is well to have enough, and something to spare. And I dare say, you often long to be a little richer than you now are. But money cannot drive away worry. It cannot bring joy to the heart.

What then is it, which will make us truly happy? The grace of God is the one great thing which can bring peace to the soul. Oh, what a happiness to know that He is your Father and your Friend! To be able to look up and feel that He is yours, and you are His — this is happiness!

You have sinned — perhaps very long and very greatly. But remember, 'God is love' to His redeemed children. He is full of mercy, and ready to forgive. He has sent His dear Son to save you. And He will receive every penitent sinner who comes to Him through Christ, looking to His precious blood to save Him.

Yes, dear friend, you may be very happy — happier in your old age, than you have ever been before. God can give you happiness; and He will give it to you if you cast yourself on Him, and take Him as your portion.

Now, go to God and ask Him to show you your sins, and to pardon them all for Jesus' sake. Oh, seek Him in earnest prayer, and never rest until you have found Him. Pray for the Holy Spirit. Entreat Him to come into your dark soul and enlighten it. Beseech Him to change your evil heart — to take away all that is wicked in it, and to fill it with what is holy and good. Ask Him to show Christ to you, and to enable you to believe in Him. Ask Him to lead you in that blessed path of holiness, which He points out for His people. Then you will be happy. Here is the grand secret of all real peace. Here is rest for the weary soul — joy for those who have never tasted it before. But there are two or three more hints I should like to offer you:

Try and take a bright view of everything. Look at things on their sunny side. Do not dwell much on your pains and aches, your troubles and infirmities, your trials and misfortunes. They may be very great; but they will not grow lighter by always harping upon them! Rather love to dwell on your many blessings — and your many mercies.

You will say, perhaps, 'I cannot help thinking of my troubles!' Yes — but you can help it, by making an effort to do so. A dull, complaining spirit grows upon people sometimes without their knowing it. Do try and check it — or it will make your days miserable, and displeasing to God.

Determine to be content with your lot — whatever it is. Paul says, 'I have learned' (ah! and he found it a good lesson when he had learned it!) 'I have learned in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.' A thankful and a contented spirit is a continual feast. We ought to be contented, and we shall be contented — if we are in the habit of seeing God in everything, and living upon Him day by day. Oh, for a spirit of true thankfulness!

Oh, for a heart to praise the Lord, A heart from sin set free, A heart that's sprinkled with the blood, So freely shed for me!

Jane Down was a woman of about sixty-five. She was well-off in the world, having much money of her own. I never went to see her, that she did not find something to complain of. Either her head ached; or her knee troubled her; or somebody had been speaking against her; or the weather was too hot — or too cold. You could at once see that she had not found out the secret of true happiness. She was a constant trouble to herself — and a weariness to her friends!

Widow Kingston lived near her. She was supported partly by her son, and partly by parish dole. But her cottage was as clean and tidy as Jane Down's, though she had not half as many things in it. She was sure to welcome you with a smile, if you went to see her. She was sure to say something pleasant; and you felt afterwards that it did you good to pay her a visit. She had not much of this world's good things; but she possessed Christ. She loved her Savior, and it was her greatest joy to speak of His goodness. There was a calm peace in that poor widow's heart, which nothing could rob her of. Having Christ — she had all!

What made the difference between these two old people? What made the one contented and happy — while the other was sour, and discontented, and miserable? It was grace that made them to differ. The one was under the influence of the Holy Spirit — the other was destitute of His indwelling power. The one knew Christ and loved Him — to the other He was a stranger.

Try and live above the world. A ship that is 'homeward bound' cares little for the winds and waves — just so long as it sails on speedily towards the desired harbor. Heaven is the peaceful Harbor which you wish to reach. Why then think so much about the storms and tempests, which buffet you on your way? They will soon be over. Face them manfully. Take them patiently. Bear them meekly. Keep your eye ever fixed on Christ and Eternity! And then the troubles of this present world — will not greatly trouble you.

Oh, that Christ may give you, dear reader, His own peace — that peace which He promised to His people, when He said, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid!'

01.07. The Aged Christian and His BIBLE

The Aged Christian and His BIBLE

Possibly you may have met with a very nice tract, called 'The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain.' This shepherd was a plain, simple man, with scarcely any learning. But there was one sort of knowledge, of which he had a great deal. And there was one kind of happiness which he enjoyed more than most men. He was one who feared and loved God, and the Holy Scriptures were his delight. He read them daily, and his soul was greatly refreshed and comforted by them. They were 'more to him than his necessary food.'

Some were astonished at his knowledge. They wondered how one who had so little learning — could know so much. Where did it come from? How was it, that he, a poor unschooled man, had so much wisdom? He gleaned it all from the Word of God. That Word was brought home to his heart by the Holy Spirit, and it taught him much. And what has the Word of God done for you? Has it brought life and comfort to your soul? You have a Bible, I dare say, and often read it. But do you enjoy it? Is it precious to your soul? Had you rather give up every other book, than give up your Bible? Is it your constant companion? Do you feel, as you read it, that it is as if God was speaking by it to your soul?

Two people may read their Bibles very differently. One may read down a chapter or two every day, as regularly as the clock strikes. He may get through a vast deal of Scripture in the course of the year. The Sacred Volume may often be seen in his hand. And yet he may be none the better for his reading. His mind may be as dark as ever, and his hopes of heaven as dim and cloudy. With all his reading — he may never receive God's truth into his soul. He may never know Christ as his Savior.

Another may study the Bible with far greater profit. He may not be a learned man, or have had much schooling. He may find a difficulty in making out some of the hard words he meets with. But he is a humble man; and so he looks up to God for His teaching. He never opens the Holy Volume without breathing a prayer — a secret, silent prayer, it may be, within his own heart — a prayer that the Holy Spirit may open his eyes, and help him to understand and feel the truths he reads. Thus the Word falls like seed upon the open furrow. It does not remain on the surface — but sinks down into his very soul. It takes root there. It instructs him. It brings joy and peace to his heart. It makes him 'wise unto salvation.'

Let the Bible be your constant study. It is God's Word — and it is therefore the best of books. It tells you the way to be saved; therefore it is most precious. It speaks to you of your Savior and your eternal home; and therefore it should be most sweet to you.

I would recommend you to get a good large Bible with a clear print. And when you have got it — use it. Do not put it aside on the shelf, and be afraid to use it for fear of its getting soiled. But read it very often, so that you may become well acquainted with its blessed truths. And a happy thing it is, if you can say with one of old, 'Your word is sweet to my taste; it is sweeter than honey to my

mouth!

I dare say you will find, in the course of your reading — much that you do not understand. Do not let this trouble you. There are many passages in God's Word, which even the most learned find it difficult to explain. God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and His ways higher than our ways — so it is no wonder that we cannot understand everything.

I have heard of an aged Christian who was once asked — 'How is it that you have so good a knowledge of your Bible?' 'Why, this,' she said, 'is the plan I always go upon — when I come to a hard verse or a difficult word, I do not dwell much upon it; but I put a slip of paper in the page, and then read on. And presently I come to some passage which explains the one I could not understand. Thus I am able to take out one marker after another. And the consequence is, there are but few places which cause me much difficulty.'

Try this plan, and I think you will find it helpful. There are difficulties in God's Word; but Scripture will often explain Scripture. And, after all, ought we not to be very thankful that there is so much that we can understand — so much that we can receive for the life and nourishment of our souls!

One thing is very necessary, and that is, to read the Bible with prayer. Our minds are dark and ignorant, and we need enlightening. Now, even if we had a friend always at our elbow, ready to explain to us every passage — we would still need something more. For man cannot make the blind eye to see. This is God's work. He who commanded the light to shine out of darkness — He who said, 'Let there be light, and there was light' — He must shine into our hearts!

Then, ask for His enlightening grace. Pray earnestly that the Holy Spirit may come and enlighten your mind and heart. He is the teacher that we need; for 'who teaches like Him?'

Whenever you open the Bible then, remember to ask God to open your heart. Put up some such short and simple prayer as this: 'O Lord, I am blind and ignorant; do enlighten me. Teach me by Your Holy Spirit; and grant that Your Word may do my soul good, for Christ's sake.'

There are few prayers more fitting for this purpose, than that short but beautiful Collect which we have in our Prayer-books. Let us see that we understand it:

'Blessed Lord, who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning' — here we acknowledge that the Scriptures are God's Word which He has made men to write expressly for our instruction.

'Grant that we may in such a way hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them' — here is a prayer that we may not only read the words with our eyes — but that we may dwell upon them; and gather from them something for our good; and turn them over and over in our minds, just as animals chew the food they eat, in order to digest it.

'That by patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which You have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ.' This is the great object of reading God's Word — that we may get comfort from it, and be enabled to lay fast hold of that everlasting life which Christ has purchased for us.

You see there is a great deal in this Prayer, and it is very suitable to our needs. But it matters not whether you use the Collect I have mentioned, or any other suitable words — so long as you earnestly pray for God's teaching and blessing.

Only read the Bible in a prayerful, humble, childlike spirit — and I am sure you will not read it in vain. You will find there a treasure — which will enrich and comfort your soul day by day!

There was a time when the Bible was a scarce and costly book — so that few could own one. Now, thank God, it can be purchased by the poorest person, and we may each of us have a copy of it which we can call our own. May we prize it as our dearest possession, and be very thankful to God for giving us so rich a gift!

Holy Bible! Book Divine! Precious treasure, you are mine! Mine, to tell me whence I came; Mine, to teach me what I am! Mine, to chide me when I rove;

Mine, to show a Savior's love! Mine are you to guide my feet; Mine, to judge, condemn, acquit! Mine, to comfort in distress, If the Holy Spirit bless; Mine, to show by living faith, Man can triumph over death! Mine to tell of joys to come,

And the rebel sinner's doom! O you precious book divine! Precious treasure, you are mine!

01.08. The Aged Christian in the House of God

The Aged Christian in the House of God The House of God has special charms for the Christian in his old age. There is a calm, quiet, soul-refreshing atmosphere there, which is peculiarly sweet to one who longs for rest. You can leave the noise and turmoil of the world, with all its vanities and sins — and there meet your God, and hold sweet fellowship with Him. The Lord is everywhere. He is 'about our path, and about our bed.' But He is specially with us in His own House. There we feel His nearness, and we are sometimes ready to exclaim, as Jacob did at Bethel, 'Surely the Lord is in this place; this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!'

Good old Eli loved the Lord's House. Many a happy and blessed hour he spent in those sacred courts. David too rejoiced to be there: 'A day in your courts is better than a thousand spent elsewhere. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God — than dwell in the tents of wickedness.' Simeon enjoyed his visits to the Temple. There it was that he saw the Savior, whom he so greatly longed to behold. And this made him quite willing to die, 'Lord, now let you your servant depart in peace, according to your Word; for my eyes have seen your salvation.' We read also in the Gospels of one Anna, who was of a 'very old,' a widow of about eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying.' The House of God was her delight. It seemed like a little heaven below. The voice of prayer and praise was music in her ears.

Well, dear friend, I hope you can say of the courts of the Lord, 'I love to be there. There I have spent my happiest moments. There I have found a peace, which the world can never rob me of. There I have often had my heart warmed with love to Christ and to His people. There I have oftentimes gone with a heavy burden — but I have left it behind me, and come away lightened.'

Dear is to me the Sabbath morn,
The village bells, the pastor's voice;
These oft have found my heart forlorn,
And these have bid my heart rejoice.
And dear to me the winged hour,
Spent in Your hallowed courts,
O Lord; To feel devotion's soothing power,
And catch the manna of Your Word.
And dear to me the loud Amen,
Which echoes through the blest abode,
Which swells, and sinks, and swells again,
Dies on the walls — but lives to God.

Oh, when the world, with iron hand,
Would bind me in its six days' chain,

Thus burst, O Lord, the strong man's band,
And let my spirit loose again!
But it is not every kind of church-going that does us good. Many a young person, and many an old one too — goes there without getting much profit. Let me offer you then a few friendly directions.

1. Always go to God's House expecting a blessing. Look out for it, and specially ask for it. Go in a devout spirit. Before you leave your home, kneel down for a moment or two and beg of the Lord to prepare your heart by His Holy Spirit, and enable you to worship Him as you ought.

2. When there, enter with all your heart into the service. During the prayers, join earnestly with your fellow-worshippers. It is not enough to sit quietly while your minister sends up his petitions to heaven; but pray the prayers yourself. Yes, pray them with all your soul.

3. When the verses are read out of God's Word — listen with your whole attention. It may be you have often heard those chapters before, or read them yourself; but they contain precious truths, which are always new to the hearing ear and the understanding heart.

4. During the sermon — be a humble listener. You should be as a little child — feeling that your knowledge is but small, and that you have much to learn. You should be like a hungry man — who comes to be fed, seeking to get your soul nourished by the bread of life. You should be like the thirsty soil — which waits to drink in the falling shower. If we all heard in this way — who can tell what blessings would flow from every service, and how many would come away from this ordinance of God filled and refreshed!

Perhaps you are growing deaf — and can only pick up a part of what is said by the preacher. Perhaps too your memory fails you — when you try to gather up what you have heard. Still, you can carry away something; and you will be thankful for that something, if you feel that it is a part of God's own message.

5. When you come home from church — do not forget the service in which you have been engaging. Converse about it, if you have an opportunity. Get out your Bible, and find the text; and then talk over any part of the sermon which you can remember. This is the way to refresh your memory, and to lay up a store of spiritual knowledge.

6. When Holy Communion is administered — do not fail to receive it. Be thankful when your Communion Sundays come around, and rejoice in the opportunity of feeding on the body and blood of Christ.

Some aged people 'take the Sacrament,' as they call it, as a mere matter of form. They come to the Lord's Table because there is something respectable in doing so, or because their minister expects to see them there. But if they only come for this reason, it is to them but a poor, cold, dry, unmeaning service; and, instead of pleasing God, they only offend Him! But I trust that you, my dear friend, are not one of these formal communicants. I trust that you come to this blessed ordinance under a deep feeling of your own sinfulness and unworthiness, and desire to draw near to Christ with humble and living faith. You come, not because you are worthy to come — but because you feel your need of strength and grace. You come to Jesus to be pardoned and healed, and to receive fresh life from Him.

I have said that David, and Simeon, and Eli, and Anna — all loved God's House. But you have reason to love it even more than they did. For they lived only in old Jewish days. The light was but very dim then. But now it shines brightly and clearly upon us. Christ has come; and He has plainly set before us as 'the way, the truth, and the life.'

Then love the House of God. Go there as often as the bells of the sanctuary call you. And remember your Savior's gracious promise; 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name — there am I in the midst of them.' May your Sabbaths be more and more happy, as you draw nearer to that endless Sabbath which you hope to spend above! May your love for God's House, for God's Word, and God's people — be ever increasing, until you are called away to join the 'one family in heaven,' and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God! Your earthly Sabbaths, Lord, I love, But there's a nobler rest above. Oh, that I might that rest attain, From sin, from sorrow, and from pain!

01.09. The Aged Christian in His CLOSET

The Aged Christian in His CLOSET

There are times when we must be alone with God. There are times when the Christian needs to get away from others — and draw near to his Heavenly Father. Our Lord knew that this was needful for the well-being of our souls; and therefore He said, 'When you pray, enter into your closet, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in secret.' Jesus, you see, is here speaking of private prayer, when no one is present with us but God Himself.

Think how great your need is — both as regards your body and your soul. Have you not need of God's protecting care to keep you alive from day to day? Have you not need of His guiding hand to direct you in your path? Have you not need of His grace to keep you from falling into sin, and to strengthen your faith? Have you no bad habits to get rid of, and no bad tempers to subdue? Are there no friends, or neighbors, for whom you should intercede? Is there no work of Christ going on in the world, for which you should pray? Surely these are matters which you have great need to bring before God.

Think too how great are your sins. There are sins, committed long ago in the days of your youth, which you need to confess. And there are later sins — newly committed, perhaps — which lie heavy on your conscience; these too must be repented of — or you cannot be happy. Oh, how many things there are which we have left undone — how many that we have done wrongly — how many little sins, which we scarcely notice at the time — how many secret sins, which the world knows nothing of! We must carry all these to the Cross — and entreat Christ to wash them away in His own blood.

Think again how great are your mercies. You have cause to thank your Heavenly Father for all His past goodness to you, and for all His present gifts. Oh, how great they are — and how little you have deserved them! Why has He spared you so long? Why are you yet alive — when so many have been cut off? Has He not fed you, and clothed you — all your life long? Has He not preserved you from ten thousand dangers? Has He not shielded you in the hour of temptation? Has He not kept you from sin — when others have fallen into it? A clergyman was once visiting a hospital. And as he went from bed to bed in the different wards, he came to an old man, who was apparently suffering much pain. He began to express his pity for this poor sufferer. 'Is there anything, my friend, that you need?' he asked. 'No,' replied the old man; 'I have many mercies and blessings in this place. I want but one thing.' 'And what is that?' asked the clergyman. 'I want,' said he, 'a more thankful heart.'

Yes, we have all of us great needs, great sins, and great mercies. And this should bring us on our knees, and stir us up to prayer.

But, my dear friend, do you know what prayer, real prayer, is? It is not the mere utterance of words. It is not the mere moving of the lips. It is not the mere repeating of a string of sentences, which we have learned by heart.' No, this is not prayer. Prayer is drawing near to our gracious

Father, telling Him all about our soul, begging of Him to pardon all our sins, asking Him to give us all we need, and thanking Him for His daily mercies. Prayer is speaking to God, though we cannot see Him.

You need not offer up long prayers. God does not judge our prayers, by their length; but He looks to our earnestness. You need not offer up learned prayers. The sighing of a contrite heart, and the words of a soul that feels — are enough for Him. Perhaps you may find it best to speak to God in your own words, or perhaps you had rather use some prayer which you have learned. It matters little which — just so that your prayer comes from the heart.

Let me now say a word as to when you should offer up prayer. Certainly morning and evening are the natural times for prayer. I dare say you have always been accustomed to say your prayers then. We should begin and end the day upon our knees. We should do nothing in the morning — before we have solemnly put ourselves under God's care; and in the evening — one of our last acts should be to visit the throne of grace before we lie down to rest. Yes, these are the two best and most proper seasons for regular private prayer.

But, dear friend, if you know the value of prayer — you will not be content with your morning and evening devotions. Twelve or fourteen hours are a long while to go without speaking to your heavenly Friend. I would recommend you to have a little time for prayer in the middle of the day. Get a quiet five or ten minutes, if you can at noon. This was David's custom and Daniel's; and it is the custom of most of God's people. I strongly advise you to try it, if you have not already done so. When you come to die, you will not feel that you have prayed too much or too often. Your sorrow will then be, that although God was always ready to hear you — you were so backward in drawing near to Him. But does not Paul say, 'Pray without ceasing?' This, at first sight, seems to be a very hard direction to follow. To be always praying! To be ever on our knees! To be at the throne of grace all day long! This is more than the holiest men — even Paul himself — could do. What he means is, that we should be always in a praying frame — that we should be ready to go to Him on all occasions — and that there should be a constant fellowship between us and our God.

Try, then, and act on Paul's advice. Besides praying at stated times, get into the way of putting up a word or two to God, oftentimes during the day. When you are sitting in your chair, you can lift up your heart to God. When you are walking along the street, you can breathe out a secret petition to your gracious Father. Though you may say nothing aloud — your inward soul may pray. No one will hear you; but God, who hears in secret, hearkens to your request. For instance, if you are going to do anything for which you want strength given you, put up some such words as these, 'Lord, help me!' If a feeling of your sinfulness comes across you, you may breathe a secret prayer, saying, 'Lord, save me!' Or if you want to have your Savior near you, you may dart up some such short request as this, 'O Lord, be with me!' 'Jesus, make me to feel Your presence.' My dear reader, if you wish to live a heavenly life, this habit of constant prayer will be a great help to you. It will keep you close to God, and will bring down His grace upon you. If you are a true Christian, you will love prayer.

You hope to spend eternity with God; oh, then, seek to know Him and to love Him now. Let Him be no stranger to you — but your daily and hourly companion. If you had a friend near you whom you specially loved, would you not wish often to look upon him? Would you not feel that those moments were the happiest — which you spent in his presence, and when he was by your side?

Would you not be often speaking to him? I am sure you would. Then act the same with Him who is better than all earthly friends, in whose favor is life, and whose presence is fullness of joy!

If you wish to be much blessed — pray. If you wish to have a foretaste of heaven even while on earth — pray. If you wish to know, and to love, and to possess Christ — be much in prayer. If you wish to tread safely the path of life, and to go on your way rejoicing — pray. 'Pray without ceasing.' 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving — present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus!' Php 4:6-7

01.10. The Aged Christian Ready for His Departure

The Aged Christian Ready for His Departure

One would think that the longer a person lived — the more willing he would be to leave his present earthly abode. But this is not always the case.

Sometimes, alas! we see very aged people clinging to this world more tightly even than the young. We see them close to the grave's mouth — and yet loving the riches, the pleasures, the trifles of this world — with all their affections! Oh, this is a sad sight! It is sad to see a poor dying creature entering upon a solemn eternity — with a heart glued to the world which he is leaving, and full of its concerns! When this is the case with a Christian — God often in mercy sends us some affliction. He withers our gourds which have grown up around us, that He may lead us to seek a truer and a safer shelter. He sees that we are too fond of these clay cottages of ours; so He makes the walls to crumble, that we may be content to leave them at His call.

Look at your growing infirmities, dear reader, as so many mercies. Let them serve to remind you that you will not be here always, and that this world 'is not your rest, because it is polluted!' Let your growing infirmities make you long for that happier land, where there shall be no more old age — where sorrow and sighing shall be unknown — and where 'the inhabitant shall never say, I am sick.'

Oh, it is well for us that all is not health, and strength, and sunshine here — else we would be even fonder than we are, of our present earthly home. I do not ask you to take a gloomy view of this world, and to be full of eagerness to leave it. I do not wish you to look upon it as a dungeon, from which you are impatiently longing to escape. No, while we are here, we should 'use the world' thankfully.

We should look upon it, not as our lasting home — but as our appointed dwelling-place for a short while. It is well — if we are contented and happy here, and at the same time ever ready for our departure! It is well indeed — if we can say with Paul, as this world closes in upon us, 'I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day.'

Sit as loose as you can to this world, and be always in a state of readiness to leave it. Arrange all your worldly concerns. The more cares you have upon your hands, the more will your dying thoughts be disturbed, and your last work interrupted. Our death-bed moments are solemn ones; and therefore it is very desirable to have nothing then to do — but to die.

Above all, let not the work of salvation be left undone. Every funeral you see or hear of, every pain and infirmity you feel — seems to say to you, as Isaiah said to Hezekiah, 'Put your house in order, because you are going to die!' It is a poor thing to leave to the last — the soul's great work. It is often too late to seek a Savior then. The body will then perhaps be too weak, and the mind too

feeble — to begin to seek the Lord. Perhaps too, the Savior, when we most need Him — will then be far off from us. Having rejected Him — He will turn His face away from us, and leave us in that trying hour to ourselves. Oh, then, 'seek the Lord now, while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.'

There are many old people, who, if you question them about the future, will say that they hope all will be well. But if you press your question a little more closely, you will find that perhaps they have no true grounds for their hope. They trust that God will be merciful to them; but they cannot say with the Apostle, 'I have obtained mercy.' They have never sought it in Christ, where alone it is to be found. They have never fled for refuge to the Savior. They love Him a little — but they have not given Him their heart. All is uncertainty with them. This world is slipping from under them; and they have no sure footing on the heavenly shore.

It is a fearful thing to take the last and most important steps of our journey alone and in the dark — not to know where we are going, whether to heaven or hell. It is a fearful thing not to be sure whether we are the friends of God — or His enemies. Dear friend, if it is so with you — your deathbed will be a cheerless one.

Suppose any one was going to take a long journey; he ought to be ready for it. His traveling clothes should be prepared. Nothing should be left unsettled. Everything should be put in order. He ought to know all about the way that he is going to take. He ought to have no misgivings about his journey. His mind should be quite made up. And should we be less ready for that great and important journey which we are all going to take? Our happiness — our eternal safety — depends on it!

Oh, that we may be able to say, 'I die daily!' 'The world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world!' 'To me to live is Christ; to die is gain!' Live as a stranger and a pilgrim upon earth; daily look forward to your eternal home, and be hastening towards it. Live much with Christ now; and then, instead of dreading death — you will heartily welcome it when it comes. You will not look upon death as your foe — but as your friend. It will be to you as the gateway, through which you will pass to your glorious inheritance. You will feel no lingering attachment to the world you are leaving behind you; but you will have 'a desire to depart, and to be with Christ — which is far better!'

01.11. The Aged Christian in Death

The Aged Christian in Death

Death sometimes seizes the young. Sometimes it overtakes a person as he journeys carelessly along the road of life. Sometimes it checks the seed — before it springs up. Sometimes it nips the flower — as it begins to open to the sun. But death, while it has seized one and another person — has hitherto passed you by. You have lived, it may be, your sixty or eighty years. But now your turn is coming soon! The shore of eternity is not far off. You feel that you are drawing near to it.

Perhaps death has sounded its warning note in your ear. Its chariot wheels are drawing near. Your strength is breaking up. Your appetite is gone. Your hearing is thick and dull. Your sight has grown dim. Ah, if this world was your eternal home — it would be but a sad one now! If your only delights were to be found in the world — your lot would indeed be a mournful one; for the world can do but little for you in your present state. It seems to turn its back upon you now. But brighten up! Your Heavenly Father is near! He has blessings for you. He will not leave you in your declining years. 'I will be your God throughout your lifetime — until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you!' He is able to strengthen and comfort you in your hour of weakness. He can give you a peace which the world never gave you.

Now, I dare say — you wish to die well. You wish to leave this world with a true hope. Do you not? Then three things are specially needful to make your deathbed a happy one.

1. You must be brought to feel your guilt in God's sight. Many acknowledge this in words — but they do not thoroughly feel it in their hearts. But if the Holy Spirit awakens your soul — if you are really brought under His blessed influence — then you will not merely speak of being a sinner; but you will feel, and that deeply — the burden and guilt of sin. What a difference there is between the cold acknowledgment that you and all the world have sinned — and that deep conviction of sin which leads you to cry out in the agony of your soul, 'God be merciful to me — the sinner!'

Ask God to make you see what sin is. Pray that the Holy Spirit may show you your guilt, and lead you to sigh and cry for its removal.

'Ah,' you will say, 'is this what you mean by happiness on a deathbed? Such thoughts as these will only make me miserable!' There is some truth in this. But depend upon it, there can be no real happiness, until you have felt the misery of your sin — and had it removed. Your wound must be probed and laid open — before it can be healed. And is not this a blessed misery — if it leads to happiness? What if sorrow endures for a night — if joy dawns upon us in the morning? It is better to feel your sins now — than to feel them when you are beyond the reach of pardoning mercy! I always think that those are on the fair road to happiness, who have made the discovery that they have wandered and strayed from the right way, and are earnestly seeking to find a better path.

Look closely into your own evil heart. Try and bring every sin from its hiding-place. They lie, some of them, very deep. Pray then, 'Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my

thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.'

Remember that there is not a sin which you have ever been guilty of — even though it be years and years ago — that is not written down in God's iron memory. The sins of your youth, which you may have long since quite forgotten — there they are, as fresh as if they had been just committed! Yes, you have need to ask God to wipe them out of His remembrance, though they will always be fresh in your own. The prayer of David will just suit you, 'Do not remember the sins of my youth. Remember me in the light of your unfailing love, for you are merciful, O Lord.' To feel your sins then is important — very important. But something more is needful. You must get them pardoned, blotted out, put away forever. And how can this be?

2. There is a way by which the guiltiest may obtain full and free forgiveness. There is a fountain in which the vilest may wash and be clean. The blood of Christ can wipe away our deepest stains. God has sent His Son to die upon the cross; and in that cross you may find mercy. But perhaps you may imagine that you have no great need of such a Savior — that you have done nothing particularly wrong — that your heart is as clean as others — that you have lived a tolerably harmless life, and that God will at last accept you. No, dear friend, you are a sinner, a great sinner, in God's sight, though man may have nothing to lay to your charge. Oh, how much you have left undone! How much you have done wrongly! How much you have thought about your body — how little about your soul! How much have you cared about this world — how little about eternity! How much more have you loved yourself — than you have loved your Lord! Be assured, your sins are great and many — far greater, and far more, than you can ever imagine. Go then, and throw yourself on Christ the great Sin-bearer. Bring your debt to Him, who has paid it with His blood. Believe on Him. Give your whole heart to Him. Say, 'Lord, enable me to love You. Make me to taste of Your preciousness. Look in mercy upon me — a vile sinner. Help me in my great need. Pardon all my guilt, and clothe me with Your perfect righteousness.'

3. But further — we need a holy heart. And God must give this. He alone can take away 'the heart of stone' — the hard, unbelieving, unloving heart. He alone can give you a 'heart of flesh' — a believing, loving, tender heart. Happy those in whom the Holy Spirit dwells, whose souls are filled with His grace, and are daily more and more conformed to the image and likeness of Christ. And can we ever be perfectly and completely holy here on earth? No, we shall carry about with us a sinful nature to the very last. Our refuge in a dying hour must not be any goodness of our own — but the merits and atonement of Jesus our Savior.

Perhaps this book may fall into the hands of one who has been long lying upon a sick-bed. Dear reader, your bed may be a bed of peace; and it will be so if you have found the Savior. All is well — if God is your God, and Christ is your Savior. Then you need not fear. He who is your Father keeps you there. You are His prisoner. He has the keys, and in His own good time He will unlock the door — and welcome you into His presence, to be with Him forever. Or perhaps your end is near. Happy is it for you, if death and eternity are no strangers to you. Happy for you — if Jesus is your portion, and heaven your home. Then you have only to die; and death has lost its sting with you. Christ has plucked it out. You can say with the Apostle, 'I know whom I have believed.' And you can add with David, 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.'

There is now but a step between you and death. And well that it is so, if you are a true servant of God. You have nothing to dread. Death, which is 'the king of terrors' to the ungodly, is like a 'welcome messenger' to you. It is like the plank on which the sailor walks to shore, after having been tossed on the troubled ocean. It will bear you to your Father's arms! It will lay you in your Savior's bosom.

Ah, though it is hard to bear weakness and suffering — though days of pain and nights of weariness are appointed you — still you will willingly endure all this — if Christ is with you. If He 'makes all your bed in your sickness' then that bed will be a bed of blessing to you. It is better to lie there with God for your Friend — than to enjoy health and strength without Him. Your last illness may be a very precious time to you — the most important season of your whole life — the time when you shall receive the fullest communications from God, and enjoy the truest peace.

Let Christ be your watchword in death, your hope, your joy, your portion, your all. Think of Him, when you can think of nothing else. Cling to Him, when all else is slipping as it were from under you. Be assured — He will never leave you, nor forsake you.

I have read of a dying Christian, a venerable servant of God, whose wife and children stood around his bed weeping. His speech was well-near gone, and his memory had nearly left him. One of his children had asked him, 'Father, do you remember me?' and received no answer. Another and another also — but still no answer. Then his aged partner drew near. She bends over him; and as tears fall down her cheeks, she says, 'Do you not remember me?' A vacant stare. There is no light in that filmy eye. The seal of death is upon those lips. His sun has almost gone done. The shadows of death are upon him.

Then one calmer than the rest, who remembered that the love of Christ is 'strong as death,' stooped to his ear, and said, 'Do you remember Christ?' That name seemed for a moment to call back his consciousness. His pale countenance lighted up, like the last beam of day; and with a smile he replied, 'Remember Christ! Dear Christ! He is all my salvation, and all my desire!' May this be your feeling and mine in the hour of our departure!

01.12. The Aged Christian in Heaven

The Aged Christian in Heaven

What is Heaven? Where is it? We know not. And there are many more questions we would like to ask about it — but they cannot be answered. This, however, we know — That Heaven is a holy place, a happy place, an eternal resting-place, the abode of God Himself.

Heaven will be a HOLY Place. The Word of God says, 'There shall never enter into it, anything that defiles.' No unpardoned one shall be there; no Christless souls; none with unchanged hearts. This world is under a curse. Sin spoils all our actions. But there will be 'no more curse' in heaven. We shall be as holy as the angels. We shall be like the Savior. 'Beloved,' says John, 'now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him!'

Heaven will be a HAPPY Place too. Where there is holiness — there must be happiness. When is it that we enjoy the most peace here? It is when we are living nearest to God — doing His will, and following Him faithfully. Think then how great will be our bliss in heaven, when we shall be as holy as He is holy.

There will be nothing to interfere with our joy then. One would think that our happiness would be spoiled by the absence of some whom we loved here on earth, and who will not be there to share our heaven with us. But no; in some way God will prevent even this from grieving us. So long as He is glorified — we shall be content. Our song will be, 'Just and true are Your ways, O king of saints.'

I hope you can feel that you have many happy moments now. But every moment will be happy in heaven. Now, it is only chequered happiness — sorrow will creep in. But then it will be perfect and unmixed. Now, you feel peace, when you think of Jesus, and what He has done for you; and when your cold heart is warmed with His love, you are happy. But then your heart will be filled full of His love, and your cup of joy will run over!

Heaven is an Everlasting RESTING-PLACE. Oh, what a world of toil and trial this is! Perhaps you have had to work hard all your life, and eat your bread with labor. Perhaps you have also lived poor, and often found a difficulty in getting enough. You have met with many a trial too in your day, and this has left its mark on your care-worn brow. But there will be an end of all this in heaven. It has been said, 'Earth for toil; heaven for repose.' There the weary rest. The tired limbs will ache no more. The tear will not again trickle down your cheek. There will be no more strife and confusion. We shall no more be tossed about on the troublesome waves of this world. All will be rest. But it will not be a rest of sloth and idleness. There would be no happiness in that. We shall all serve God day and night. The angels serve Him now; it is their greatest joy to be employed for Him. And so it will be with us. To do His will — will be our constant employment; and to sing His praises — our great delight. We shall not rest day nor night, saying, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty.'

Heaven is the dwelling-place of GOD Himself. We shall be with Him. We shall spend eternity in His presence. What an honor! What blessedness! If we have any dear friend on earth whom we specially love — are we not very happy in his company? What will it be to be near our Lord — to see Him, and be with Him, forever? 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them!'

This, my dear friend, is the prospect before you. Why should you grieve then that your earthly house is tottering and giving way — when you have such a house as this in store for you? Oh, be of good courage. A few more days in this weary world — and then a home of perfect joy forever! Is this Heavenly home yours? I hope it is. Jesus has prepared it for His people. But remember, you need to be prepared for it. You need to have every sin washed away in your Savior's blood. You have an evil, wicked heart. Ask God to take it away, and to give you a new and clean heart. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you, to enlighten you, to show Christ to you, and to make you every day more and more like your Savior. Ask Him to bend your will to His.

It is possible that some reader of these pages may have been traveling all his long life towards Hell. He may have followed his own ways, and despised the ways of God. He may have loved sin and rejected a Savior. And now he has come to the brink of eternity; and all before him is dark and hopeless.

O sinner, I tremble for you! It is written, 'The wicked shall be turned into hell — and all the people that forget God.' 'The wages of sin is death.' What is to become of you? You will soon die. And what then? What is there after death? There is the awful judgment; 'the great white throne;' and all gathered before it — and you among the number. The books will be opened, and your sins all written there! And then the final sentence — the just and righteous sentence! Oh, who shall stand, when He appears? Who shall dwell with everlasting burnings? Your case is bad, very bad. Shall I say that it is utterly hopeless? No, I dare not say so. I have seen on a dark gloomy day, when almost the whole heavens have been covered with a thick mantle of clouds — I have seen a little speck of light in the distant sky, which has given me hope. And if you open God's Word, you may see a little bright opening of hope ever near. There is a whisper from heaven to you, more welcome than the gleam of sunshine, which says, 'Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.'

You have greatly sinned. You have done much to shut yourself out from God's mercy. But He has followed you in all your wanderings. He is ready to win you back. He calls to you in words of love and tenderness. Ah, and He seems now once more to hold the door of mercy open. He seems to say to you, 'Why will you die?' He can pardon even now. Think of the cross. Throw yourself down, as it were, before it. Look there for mercy — and you may yet find it.

Yes, my brother, or my sister, you are late, very late; but your day of grace may not yet be past. You may seek Christ, and find Him even now. 'Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.' But if, on the other hand, you are a true servant of Christ, though you feel yourself unworthy to be called His — if, as you have grown in years, you have gone on loving and serving Him more and more — then you may think of death without alarm — and what is more, you may think of the bright and happy home beyond. Is there not something very sweet in those words, 'My Home!' Happy is the hardworking laborer, who, when evening comes — has a home to return to!

Happy is the prisoner, who, when his day of liberty arrives — has a home to receive him! Happy the traveler — who journeys on with the cheering prospect that he is getting nearer home! But still more happy the Christian, whether rich or poor — who, after a long life in this poor world, has a sure and certain hope that he is daily and hourly drawing nearer to his Heavenly Home! And how sweet the thought of entering that Home — never more to leave it! How blessed, when all our trials and all our journeyings are over, to enjoy that rest which remains to the people of God! Then we shall be permitted to sing —

It is no longer 'going home, For heaven is reached at last! The weary wilderness, thank God, is now forever passed!

I've bid the world a glad farewell; I've done with suffering now; And never more one passing grief Shall shade my peaceful brow!

I've reached at length my native land, The place I truly love. Clad in my Savior's spotless robe, I've joined the hosts above!

I've reached my home, that home so dear To every pilgrim's heart; And never shall my feet again From its glad walls depart!

I've joined that blessed band above Of brethren kindred dear; But better far, my Lord I see, And His loved voice I hear!

I've reached my home, my happy home, So holy and so pure; And (blessed thought!) I know it shall Eternally endure! For those whom Jesus died to save, He ever lives to bless; Those Mansions which His love prepares, His children shall possess! And now, dear reader, it is time that I bid you farewell. If I have said one word that has helped you on your way — if you have learned a single truth from this book — if I have given a little spur to your faith, or kindled a spark of love in your soul — if, in short, you are in any way the better for having read these pages — to God be all the praise! We shall both give it to Him throughout eternity. May you and I, unworthy as we are, be numbered among God's blood-bought family — among the Savior's friends! And may we hereafter sit down together in the kingdom of our Father!

01.13. Private Prayers

Private Prayers 1. For the Morning.

O Almighty Father, look down in mercy upon me Your sinful creature, who now approach You. I dare not come to You in my own name — but in the name of Jesus, my beloved Savior. Hear me, for His sake.

You know, Lord, how much I have done wrong in the days that are past. I have sinned against You in my youth, in my riper years, and even in my old age. Oh, make me to feel my sins. Make me to mourn over them with godly sorrow. Bring them all to my remembrance. Hide nothing from me. Show me my own evil heart.

I thank You that You have sent Your dear Son to die upon the cross for me. Pardon me, for His sake. Wash away every stain of my guilt in His precious blood.

And, O blessed Spirit, make me holy. Be pleased to take away this stony heart of mine, and give me a heart to love You. Teach me all that I need to know. Especially teach me to know, and to love, and to serve my Savior.

I thank You, O God, for having kept me safely during the past night. Let Your blessing rest on me this day. Be with me in my going out and coming in, in my sitting down and rising up. Keep me this day from sinful thoughts and evil tempers. Make me contented and happy. May I desire to do Your will in all things. May I live not for this world — but for eternity.

Hear me, O my Father, bless me, and save me, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

2. For Noon.

O My God, I come to You, for I feel that I cannot live without You. Be very near to me, and take up Your abode within my heart.

You know how apt I am to forget You, and how ready my mind is to wander from You. Be pleased to call me back. Draw me upwards towards You. My soul cleaves unto the dust; quicken me according to Your Word.

Blessed be Your name for having spared me through a long life, and for showing me so many mercies, which I have but little deserved. Be with me during the remainder of my earthly pilgrimage. I have lived long enough to the world and to self; may I now live unto You.

Keep me watchful. Keep me prayerful. Keep me humble. Strengthen my poor weak faith. Kindle some love in my soul. Oh, make me truly Yours — Yours now and Yours forever, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

3. For the Evening.

O Most gracious God, I thank You that I have been brought safely to the close of another day. Blessed be Your name for all the mercies which surround me — for the food I eat, and the clothing I put on. Above all, I thank You for the still greater mercies which concern my soul. I thank You that I have a Savior, and that He has promised pardon and eternal life to all who believe on Him. Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.

Blessed Jesus, grant me to love You. May my last days be my best days. Grant that I may redeem the time that I have so often wasted, and live henceforth more entirely to You.

Prepare me for death. Enable me to look forward to it without alarm. Give me a full and happy trust in Christ my Savior. As I grow in years, may I each day grow riper for heaven.

Lord, bless my family, my neighbors, and friends. May I ever be trying to be useful to them. Bless all who are kind to me. Be with my minister, and give him grace to speak words that will do me good.

O my Father, hear me in this my prayer, which I offer up in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

01.14. HYMNS for the Aged

HYMNS for the Aged

For a Time of SICKNESS.

When languor and disease invade This trembling house of clay, 'Tis sweet to look beyond our cage
And long to fly away!

Sweet to look inward and attend The whispers of His love; Sweet to look upward to the place
Where Jesus pleads above.

Sweet to look back, and see my name In life's fair book set down; Sweet to look forward, and
behold Eternal joys my own!

Sweet to reflect how grace Divine My sins on Jesus laid; Sweet to remember that His blood My
debt of suffering paid!

Sweet in His righteousness to stand, Which saves from second death; Sweet to experience day by
day His Spirit's guiding breath.

Sweet in the confidence of faith To trust His firm decrees; Sweet to lie passive in His hands, And
know no will but His.

If such the sweetness of the stream, What must the fountain be, Where saints and angels draw
their bliss Immediately from Thee?

SUBMISSION.

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." Luke 22:42

My God and Father, while I stray Far from my home on life's rough way, Oh, teach me from my
heart to say, 'Your will be done.'

If You do call me to resign What most I prize — it ne'er was mine; I only yield You what was Thine:
'Your will be done.'

Should pining sickness waste away My life in premature decay, My Father, still I strive to say,
'Your will be done.'

If but my fainting heart be blessed With Your sweet Spirit for my guest, My God, to You I leave the
rest: 'Your will be done.'

Renew my will from day to day; Blend it with Yours, and take away All that now makes it hard to
say, 'Your will be done.'

Then, when on earth I breathe no more, The prayer, oft mixed with tears before I'll sing upon a
happier shore, 'Your will be done.'

Rest for the Weary.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28

I Heard the voice of Jesus say, Come unto Me, and rest; Lay down, you weary one, lay down Your head upon My breast.

I came to Jesus as I was, Weary, and worn, and sad; I found in Him a resting-place, And He has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, Behold, I freely give The living water: thirsty one, Stoop down, and drink, and live.

I came to Jesus, and I drank Of that life-giving stream, My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, And now I live in Him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, I am this dark world's light; Look unto Me, your morn shall rise, And all your day be bright.

I looked to Jesus, and I found In Him my Star, my Sun; And in that light of life I'll walk Until traveling days are done.

The Wanderer Restored.

"For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls." 1 Peter 2:25

I was a wandering sheep, I did not love the fold; I did not love my Shepherd's voice. I would not be controlled.

The Shepherd sought His sheep; The Father sought His child; They followed me o'er hill and dale, O'er desert, waste, and wild.

Jesus my Shepherd is: 'Twas He who loved my soul, 'Twas He who washed me in His blood, 'Twas He who made me whole.

'Twas He who sought the lost, That found the wandering sheep; 'Twas He who brought me to the fold; 'Tis He who does me keep.

I was a wandering sheep, I would not be controlled; But now I love the Shepherd's voice, I love, I love the fold!

The Better Country

"Instead, they were longing for a better country — a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them!" Hebrews 11:16

I'm but a stranger here, Heaven is my home; Earth is a desert drear, Heaven is my home.

Danger and sorrow stand Round me on every hand; Heaven is my fatherland,

Heaven is my home.

What though the tempest rage? Heaven is my home: Short is my pilgrimage,

Heaven is my home.

And time's wild wintry blast Soon will be overpast; I shall reach home at last,

Heaven is my home.

There at my Savior's side, Heaven is my home; I shall be glorified; Heaven is my home.

There are the good and blessed, Those I loved most and best, And there I too shall rest; Heaven is my home.

Therefore I murmur not, Heaven is my home: Whatever my earthly lot,

Heaven is my home.

And I shall surely stand There at my Lord's right hand Heaven is my fatherland, Heaven is my home.

Heavenly Mansion.

"In my Father's house are many mansions." John 14:2

I have a home above, From sin and sorrow free, A mansion which eternal Love

Designed and formed for me.

My Father's gracious hand Has built this sweet abode; From everlasting it was planned, My dwelling-place with God.

My Savior's precious blood Has made my title sure; He passed through death's dark raging flood, To make my rest secure.

The Comforter is come, The promise has been given; He leads me onward to the home Reserved for me in Heaven.

Bright angels guard my way, His ministers of power, Encamping round me night and day, Keep me in danger's hour.

Loved ones are gone before, Whose pilgrim days are done: I soon shall meet them on that shore Where partings are unknown.

Your love, You precious Lord, My joy and strength shall be, Until You shall speak the gladdening word That bids me rise to Thee.

And then through endless days, Where all Your glories shine, In happier, holier strains I'll praise The grace that made me Thine!

The Pilgrim's Song

A Pilgrim and a stranger, I journey here below; Far distant is my country,

The Home to which I go.

Here I must toil and travel, Oft weary and oppressed, But there my God shall lead me To everlasting rest.

I've met with storms and dangers Even from my early years, With enemies and conflicts, With fightings and with fears.

There's nothing here that tempts me To wish a longer stay; So I must hasten forwards, No halting or delay.

So I must hasten forwards, Thank God the end will come! The land of my sojourning Is not my destined home.

That evermore abideth, Jerusalem above, The everlasting city, The land of light and love.

There still my thoughts are dwelling; 'Tis there I long to be. Come, Lord, and call Your servant To blessedness with Thee.

Come, bid my toils be ended, Let all my wanderings cease, Call from the wayside lodging To the sweet home of peace.

There I shall dwell forever, No more a stranger guest, With all Your blood-bought children, In everlasting rest.

The pilgrim toils forgotten, The pilgrim conflicts o'er, All earthly griefs behind us, Eternal joys before!

02.00. The Christian Life

The Christian Life!

Ashton Oxenden, 1882

PREFACE This little work has been thrown into a new form, and a few additions have been made to it. I trust that in its present shape it may be found more useful and more interesting to the general reader.

It is no small comfort to me, now that I am laboring in a foreign land, to feel that I am still permitted to speak in these and other pages to my dear fellow-countrymen, and to the members of my own beloved Church. May God still bless my words, and use them for winning souls to Himself!

Courtesy www.gracegems.org

02.01. Living Without God

01. Living Without God

How can I live well? and how can I die well? are two of the most important inquiries we can make. I wish every one of my readers was really anxious to have them answered. I wish that every one now taking the Bible in hand felt a real earnest desire to know the way of life, and to walk in it.

Blessed Spirit of God, give us this concern. Awaken in us this longing. Give us now thirsting souls, which only Your truth can satisfy. Bless the writer of this volume — enable him to speak for You. And send none away from the perusal of this book empty and unfed.

'The Christian Life' is a subject of much importance; and I do trust that it may interest you, and do you much good.

'The Christian Life' — this is my subject; and my first chapter will be on Living without God.

Paul speaks in his Epistle to the Ephesians of those who have not yet entered on the Christian Life, and have therefore 'no hope, and are without God in the world.' Who are these? There were many in his day, and there are many now, living just as he describes — without hope and without God. The Gospel had only reached Ephesus about ten years before these words were written. Even these very Christians whom he addresses were, a short time before, in all the misery and darkness of heathenism. There was no one to show them the way of salvation. No one in that famous city knew that there was a Savior, or could give any tidings of that other world to which they were all hastening. But now the light from above had shone upon them: the 'Sun of Righteousness' had risen upon them with 'healing in His wings.' That was the happiest day that ever dawned upon Ephesus, when three strangers made their appearance in its streets, proclaiming the glorious news of salvation. These were Paul, and his two friends Aquila and Priscilla — Paul the Preacher, and Aquila and Priscilla his helpers. The Apostle's preaching was greatly blessed in that city, and numbers were gathered into the fold of Christ. This then was the little Christian Church, or company of Believers, to whom he afterwards wrote his epistle. In the chapter to which I have alluded, he reminds them what their state had once been, and what grace had done for them. 'At that time,' he says, 'you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.'

Now, perhaps some will say, 'Thank God, WE were never in that state. The words may suit those blind Ephesians; but we, at all events, were never in so godless and hopeless a condition as this. But in point of fact, we were in a worse condition. Yes, you and I were once even worse than they ever were. They were blind, it is true; but we had eyes — and yet would not see. All was light around us — but was there not darkness, gross darkness, within us? They were ignorant of the way of life — we knew it, but did not walk in it. They had never heard of a Savior — we were baptized in His name. We outwardly belonged to Him — but our hearts were closed against Him. Was not this the case with all of us once? Is it not the case with many of us now? And if the state

of the ignorant heathen, and of the unbelieving Jew, is a sad one — oh, sadder still is the state of the heedless professor — 'having no hope, and without God in the world.'

Let us take these two expressions separately; for they are both full of meaning.

'Having no hope!' How is it with the mere nominal Christian? Has he any hope?

Take the first man you meet, and ask him what his hope is. Perhaps he is one who entirely neglects God, a thoroughly irreligious man. But he does not acknowledge that he is altogether without hope. He will say, 'I know I am not serving the Lord. My conscience often whispers to me that all is not right. But then I hope to be one day different. It must be indeed a long lane that has no turning in it. Others have turned, and I hope I shall before I die.' Yes, he has a hope. This is his hope — that he will one day come right. The next person you come across is not a downright wicked man; but he is a little thoughtless — rather fond of the world. He will say, 'I have wronged no man. I have defrauded no man. I am no one's enemy, except perhaps my own. Surely God will not be so strict as He is represented to be. If I do not find mercy, there will be thousands in a worse condition than myself.' This is his hope.

You see a third, who is upright, honest, regular, and in every respect well conducted. Not a word was ever whispered against him. He is a kind person, a straightforward man of business, a good master, or a faithful servant. He is a church-goer too — punctual in his place in God's House. His knees are bent in prayer morning and evening. His Bible is read, if not every day, most days at least, when nothing interferes to prevent it. Has not this man a hope? Yes, certainly — and what is it? Why, he hopes that as a matter of course all must be right with him — and that the gate of Heaven will be opened to one so worthy.

Each one of these, you see, has a kind of hope. And yet what is it worth? In point of fact, it is worth nothing. It only deceives. It only gives a false peace. It acts as a soothing lotion to the conscience. It is like untempered mortar, which looks well enough when daubed upon the wall; but when the storm comes, the wall will fall to pieces. In each of these cases which I have mentioned, the hope of the Bible is lacking. None of them has a really Christian hope.

Remember, there is such a thing as a false hope — a hope that will utterly fail us. We read in the Book of Job, that 'the hypocrite's hope shall perish!' His 'trust shall be a spider's web!' And suppose a man were to trust to a mere spider's web — suppose a drowning man were to cling to it — would he not be sure to perish? Then, just as surely will those be lost, who lean upon such broken reeds as I have described.

But, thank God, there is a hope, better, stronger, and more true than these — a hope which the Apostle speaks of as 'sure and steadfast,' like the firmly grounded anchor to which the ship is moored, and then is able to defy the storm. The Christian's hope is certain. Those are blessed words in our Burial Service — blessed words, when read over the grave of a true Believer, of one who has really died in the Lord, 'We therefore commit his body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

Yes, the Christian's hope is certain; for it rests, not on what he himself has done, or upon the promise of a fellow-worm — but upon what Christ has done for him, and on the unchangeable

word and promise of his God.

You know, I dare say, that in the very center of the city of London stands the great Cathedral of St. Paul. The last time I passed by it, a few weeks ago, I saw numbers of people in the street with their eyes directed towards something high up on the steeple. I stopped, and looked also; and there, far aloft, almost out of sight, could be seen a man working in a kind of cradle. It seemed as though he was in the utmost peril — but in fact he was secure. It made one giddy to watch him; but he was quite safe. There was a strong rope to which he was slung, which passed upwards, and entered through a trap-door above him; and this rope was fastened to a stout beam within. The wind might whistle around him, but he had nothing to fear. He could look upon the dizzy crowd below, but he felt no alarm; he was safe.

What a picture of the Christian! In the hour of his greatest weakness, he looks up to Heaven and feels that all is secure. There is his Father, seated on His eternal throne! There is his Savior — no longer a suffering, dying Savior — but a living Savior, an Almighty Savior — who has paid the debt, and now rejoices to bless His saved ones. There is his anchor, firmly grounded. There is his hope, firmly fixed, as the Apostle says, 'within the veil.' And if he clings to this, nothing can ever harm him. Satan may tempt and harass him — but none can pluck him out of his Father's hands. Trials may come; sickness may come; death may come — but 'underneath are the everlasting arms,' bearing him up. Who can move him from his strong, firm hold? 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, yes rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who makes intercession for us!'

Ah, but there are thousands in Christian England — numbers whom you yourself know — of whom it may be said, They have no hope. But now let us look at the other expression, 'Without God in the world.' There are very many, who are living in God's world, but seem to forget that it is His world, and that He is the great Lord of it.

God is not in their thoughts, in their plans, in their homes, or in their hearts.

He is not in their THOUGHTS. They rise in the morning; say a short prayer, it may be; and then set about the business of the day. They eat their food; but forget the hand that feeds them. The very animals about them put them to shame; for 'The ox knows his owner, and the donkey his master's crib — but my people, says the Lord, do not consider.' They receive mercies — but they take them as a matter of course, never lifting up their hearts to Him who is the gracious Giver of them. They have continual needs — but they do not apply to Him who is ever ready to relieve them. Hour after hour passes, without one look, one cry, one desire being raised heavenward.

I ask, Is it not so with some who read this book? Have there not been many days of our lives, when we have lived as if there was no God above us — and no Savior near us? Yes, and even the more serious of us — how often do we forget God! How very few are those moments during the day, when He is foremost and uppermost in our thoughts!

Then, too, God is not in our PLANS. We are always scheming for our happiness — some in one way, and some in another. The merchant embarks in a speculation. He lays out his money in the hope of getting a good return for it. The farmer parcels out his land to the best advantage. He sows his fields, and expects to fill his barns. The servant leaves a situation in the hope of bettering

herself. We determine to do this or that tomorrow. We lay our plans for weeks and months to come. But has God nothing to do with all these arrangements? No, perhaps nothing in our view of the matter. We have never consulted Him. We have acted altogether without Him. And yet we cannot move a single step — we cannot succeed in a single instance — without His interference.

It is true, we do succeed oftentimes apparently without His help. He gives us success without our seeking it. But what is that success worth? It is an awful thing to see a godless man prospering — to see him grow richer and richer — to see his flocks and herds increasing — and yet no blessing with it. Better is it to have all our plans fail — better to have our schemes fall to the ground — than to prosper, but 'without God.'

Think of this, my friend. Begin life anew. Rearrange your plans. 'Commit your way unto the Lord — trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.' It is right, quite right, to provide for the future. It is right to be active in business. But we must also be 'fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.' Happy the man who takes God into partnership with him; and who desires that every work may be 'begun, continued, and ended in Him.'

Again, there are some of us who must own that God is not in our HOUSES. Friends are welcome. Visitors are admitted. But He, the truest Friend, the best Visitor, is shut out. And yet where God is, there is peace — peace in that home, in that family, in those hearts.

It is very painful to go into a house, and feel that there are comforts there — there is everything there that marks care, and attention, and regularity. Perhaps the master and mistress are kind, and civil, and pleasant in their manner. But there is a deficiency in that house. One thing is lacking, and that the chief of all. God is not there. Many things are thought of, and many things done; but the 'one thing needful' is neglected. Alas! is not this the case with some houses and cottages where we often enter?

Hear what the Lord Himself says, 'The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked; but He blesses the habitation of the just.'

Now, whether you are rich or poor, see that God is with you, dwelling with you, taking up His abode in the midst of you. And there is one thing that I would earnestly press upon you, and that without delay — if you have not established Family Prayer in your household, do so immediately, from this very day. A blessing will come with it. I know it will. For God has declared, 'Those who honor me, I will honor.' But there is another place from which God is often, very often, shut out — from our HEARTS.

There it is that He loves to dwell. 'Thus says the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.' The treasure of the Miser is in his heart. His money may be placed in the bank. It may be hoarded up there, or be put out to interest. But its hateful savor — the taste of it — the miserable love of it — is within him — his heart is full of it. And so, if our treasure is in Heaven, if God is our God, and Christ our Friend — then surely we shall feel His presence in our hearts, comforting us, warming us, filling us with joy and peace and gladness.

Ah, if you are one in whose heart God has no place, you are not happy. I know you cannot be. You may have friends and children to cheer you. You may have bread enough and to spare. The world

may smile upon you. But you cannot say, 'I am happy.' You cannot lift up your heart and say, 'Thank God there is peace, blessed peace, in my soul.' And now a word or two more before the chapter closes.

Ask yourself: Does Paul's language describe me? Is it possible that I can have been living hitherto 'without God,' and that if I die it will be 'without hope?'

Think what it is to LIVE without God — to feel that He is at a distance from you — that you have nothing to do with Him. Oh tremble to live another hour, another moment, without Him. Do not dare to begin another day without asking Him to be with you, to guide, and direct, and keep, and bless you. Do not dare to lay your head upon your pillow another night, without asking Him who is the Keeper of Israel to be your Keeper. Say to yourself, 'From this day I will begin a new life. God shall be my God. I will yield myself up to Him.' And think also what it is to DIE without hope. In that lonely, solitary hour, when heart and flesh fail — when the world is melting away from under us — when friends cannot help us, and thousands of gold and silver, if we had them, could give us no consolation — when life is ebbing fast, and death draws nearer, and eternity lies outspread before us — then to have no hope, no Father's arm to support us, no Savior to cling to as our refuge — who can tell the misery of this! Oh that it may not be so with you! Oh that you may 'turn to the stronghold,' as a 'prisoner of hope!' Oh that you may flee to Christ today, before the night comes, when He will be shut out from us forever! May the Lord Himself speak to some heart which He has never reached before! May He send His grace into that heart! May He disturb you, if you are asleep! May He prick your conscience, if it is dull! May He never leave you until you have heartily entered upon that new and Christian Life, of which I shall speak to you in the next chapter.

02.02. The Turning-point in the Christian Life

02. The Turning-point in the Christian Life

Let me begin by saying a word or two about the subject which has already been brought before you in the last chapter — Living without hope, and without God in the world. A fearful subject! And if it has left any impression on your heart, I am very thankful for it. If I spoke strongly, it was because I felt strongly. And if I seemed to deal harshly with you, it was because I wish faithfully to tell you the truth; and because, as much as I desire your favor — I desire far more to profit your soul.

Thank God, there is a Turning-point in the career of many of us. Thank God, there is a time with many of us, when we turn out of the broad path of the world — and heartily endeavor to walk in the narrow way of God. Though we never see the tawny Ethiopian change his skin, or the mottled leopard his spots — blessed be God, we do sometimes see a change wrought in men's hearts — a thorough, real, vital change! This is spoken of in Scripture under different names. It is called a Quickening: God is said to quicken, or give new life to our souls. It is called also a New Birth: the sinner becomes so entirely altered, that he is as one born again. Sometimes too it is called Conversion: this describes the turning of the whole man to God — the yielding up the sinful, wayward, worldly heart to His service. This is the thing which I am now going to speak about, and which I have called 'The Turning-point in the Christian Life.' God give His blessing while we dwell upon it!

How few of us have led a life of holiness! Have we not, like silly sheep, wandered and strayed from the fold?

Here then we see the need of conversion — that blessed Turning-point when a man begins to act for Christ, and to live for Christ, in the world. Our hearts need to be converted before we can live this new life. Believe me, we all need this — every one of us. And does not our Lord Himself say to us, 'Except you are converted, you shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven.' The Reckless, Ungodly Sinner needs it. He must leave the sin in which he is wallowing, and 'cleanse himself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.' The Worldly Man needs it. The love of the world must die in him, and a better love, even the love of God, must spring up within him. He must declare plainly that he seeks a better country. The mere Nominal Christian needs it; for it is one thing to 'have a name that he lives,' and quite another to give his life, his heart, his whole self, to God's service.

Yes, we all need it — for until our hearts are changed, we cannot love God. The Christian path will be all uphill to us. We can neither enjoy God's service here, nor be fitted for the happiness of Heaven. In the Parable of the Prodigal Son, a most touching picture is drawn — a full-length portrait of thousands now on earth, and of tens of thousands now in glory. If I wanted to show a sinner his complete wretchedness and misery, I would use that parable. If I wanted to touch his hard heart, and bring him on his knees before God — I would use that parable. Again, if I wanted to prove to him that, as bad as he is, and far as he has wandered, there is a return, a way back —

that pardon is not beyond his reach — that the gate of mercy is open even for him — I would read to him those simple words of Jesus. And truly from no other lips did words of mercy like those ever come. 'Never man spoke like this Man.' Never did such loving, gracious, winning words drop from any mouth, as the words of that parable, which the youngest child may understand, and from which the aged penitent may take comfort. But I am not going to dwell now on the parable; but merely on that one point in it, where it is said that the son, who had left his father's house, just as we have left ours — had sought happiness afar from him, as we have done, and found it not — at length 'came to himself;' reflected on his misery; remembered that the very servants in his once happy home were highly favored, compared with himself in his present degraded state; and at once resolved to go and cast himself at his father's feet. This was his condition, and these words beautifully describe it, 'He came to himself.' The expression is familiar to us all.

When, for instance, one has been sleeping, and you suddenly rouse him, he starts up, stares about him for a moment or two, and then you say, 'He has come to himself.' When a person has been long ill, and his illness takes a favorable turn, and he begins to recover, you say of him that he is himself again. When a fellow-creature loses his reason — when his mind fails, and the foolishness of a little child comes over him — when such an one is mercifully restored, we speak of that man as once more coming to himself. And what can better describe that moment — that happy moment — that eventful moment in our history — (and oh, that there may be just such a moment in your history!) when the soul which has been long asleep awakes, when the soul which has been long diseased rises up and recovers itself, when, the soul which has been given up to madness feels that folly must have an end? What, I say, can better describe this state, this Turning-point, than those few simple words, 'He came to himself?'

Now, if you and I have come to ourselves, how has it been effected? Or, if we are ever to come to ourselves, how will it be effected? The heart cannot change itself, any more than the dry barren soil can, if let alone, become fertile; or the wild crab-apple tree of its own accord, bear delicious fruit.

Neither can man change the heart of his fellow-man. God may use men as His instruments, but they are only instruments in His hands. An able preacher may arrest attention. He may draw tears from eyes that never wept before. He may send his hearers away thoughtful. But conversion is beyond his power. Paul never of himself converted a single soul. Peter was not the renewer of one heart on the day of Pentecost.

No, the power is God's. The work is His. 'Of His own will, He begat us with the word of truth.' 'As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God — who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.'

You come to church. Some word strikes you. You feel as you never before felt. You go away to live a new life. Or you are seized with a fit of illness. You are laid aside in your sick room. And in the stillness of that silent chamber, thoughts of the past and the future come over you. You feel that you have not lived to Christ; and you feel unfit, most unfit, to die. From that hour you become an altered person. Or a good book falls in your way. You take it up carelessly. But that book perhaps has an arrow in it which pierces your very soul. Or you receive a visit from a pious friend. You asked him to your house, because you thought his company would give you pleasure. But there is One who sent him to you for a far different purpose; namely, to lead you by his words and

his example into the blessed path of peace. By one or other of these means, you have become pious. Still, it was neither the Sermon, nor the Illness, nor the Book, nor the Friend — that wrought the wondrous change. There was a Mighty One at work! It was 'the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.'

I have said that this change is absolutely necessary, and that it is the work of God Himself. Bear these two points in mind, and reflect upon them, for they are most important. But there are three other points connected with this subject, which, though not so important, are still deeply interesting.

One is, Whether the change we have been speaking of is sudden — or gradual. Some will not believe in sudden conversions, and others again take little note of any that are not sudden. Let us look into the Bible, and then judge for ourselves.

Saul's change was sudden. He was stopped in a moment, in the very midst of his fearful opposition to the Savior, and at once became a devoted follower of Christ. The Philippian jailer's conversion again was sudden. A deep conviction of his guilt flashed across his mind, and he fell down at the Apostle's feet an inquiring penitent, and an earnest believer. On the other hand, take the case of the Ethiopian Eunuch. His conversion was gradual. He goes to Jerusalem, and there probably he hears for the first time the glad tidings of salvation. He is led to search the Scriptures. He becomes an anxious inquirer after the truth. Then, as he journeys homewards, Philip meets him by the way — not accidentally, but by the Lord's direction — and under his teaching, his mind is further enlightened, and he is enabled to see and lay hold of the great gospel hope; 'and goes on his way rejoicing.'

Or, to mention another case of gradual conversion, Apollos, of whom we read in the eighteenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, becomes impressed with religion, probably in his own native city Alexandria. For a while he gropes his way in the dark. He is fervent in spirit, and anxious to embrace the faith of Christ. But as yet there is only a glimmering of light in him. Something brings him to Ephesus. And there he meets with two earnest-minded disciples; and with their help he gets to know the way of the Lord more perfectly, and becomes at length a burning and shining light in the Church of Christ. And so it is now. Those, who are brought to God by the power of His grace, are brought in various ways. God is not tied and bound by any special rules.

Some are called into His service, as by a miracle. The change is sudden and striking. They pass rapidly from darkness to light, from sin to holiness. They are snatched by Almighty power as brands from the burning. The Holy Spirit at once convinces them of sin, and leads them to Christ; and they forthwith set out on their way to Heaven.

Others receive religious impressions; but they are slight. The world creeps in perhaps, and smothers for a while the spark which God with His own hand has kindled. The fire is lighted; but it burns slowly; and perhaps it is a long while before it bursts into a steady flame. There is grace in that soul; but it is not very marked. Still it is real grace, and by degrees it shows itself more fully. The person becomes gradually more and more enlightened, more in earnest, more decided.

So, you see, God is pleased sometimes to bring souls into His kingdom by a special act of grace — suddenly and instantaneously. And at other times He sees fit to carry on His blessed work in the soul — the very same work — but by a slower and more gradual process.

Another interesting question is this — Does a truly changed person always know when, and how, the change in him took place?

Some, doubtless, can confidently point to the exact circumstances which first led them to think seriously. God's dealing with them was so clear; the occasion was so marked; that they have no hesitation in saying, 'It was that sermon that I heard — it was that quiet time in my sick chamber — it was those words spoken by my friend — or it was when reading that verse of Scripture — or when kneeling down in secret prayer — then it was that God in His mercy first touched my heart, showed me to myself as a sinner, and led me to the Savior. I can remember it with thankfulness, as the sailor remembers his deliverance from shipwreck.'

Saul could never in after years have doubted that that eventful journey to Damascus was the Turning-point in his career. And Manasseh could without hesitation point to Babylon, and say, 'It was there, in the house of my affliction, that God first made Himself known to me. It was there I learned the misery of sin, and the way of deliverance from it.' But there are hundreds and thousands of others, just as truly and savingly converted to God, who know not how it was, or when it was, that the seed of grace sprung up within them. All they can say is, 'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind — but now I see!'

After all, the chief matter about which we need to be anxious is not the hour, or the place, or the manner, in which the change has been wrought — but the fact itself. Has such a change taken place in me? Am I very different from what I once was?

There is one more point, which I dare not leave unnoticed. There is a change in the history of some, not for the better, but for the worse. There is a Turning-point, when they begin to go back rather than forward — when the heart, which has been once warm, grows cold — when the taste for God's word and prayer grows feeble — when temptations are listened to, which once they would have blushed to mention. They change, but like 'seducers,' they 'wax worse and worse.' The night grows darker and darker. The edge of conscience becomes duller and duller. Sin is welcomed, and God forsaken.

Oh, let us beware of this. For the Spirit of God, once grieved, will not readily return. It is hard, very hard, to roll back the falling stone; or to turn the stream which has burst through its appointed channel.

Pray earnestly that, if you have never felt the working of God's grace in your heart, you may feel it now; and that, if the work is already begun — it may be carried on within you.

If there is only the beginning of good things in your soul — if there is but a feeling of earnestness, ever so slight — if there is a waking up to the great realities of eternity — if there is a desire, however faint, to live for heaven — may He, who 'despises not the day of small things,' help you on your way! May He, who knows your difficulties better than I do — bring you through them all, and enable you from this time to stand forward as a heaven-bound traveler, as one whose heart is bent on reaching a better home!

02.03. Christ, the Life of the Soul

03. Christ, the Life of the Soul

I spoke in the last chapter of God's converting power — of a soul being quickened or new-born by His grace. Now, where does the living soul find strength? From whence come its supplies? How does the new-born man live? In himself he is powerless. Within, all is emptiness. He has been awakened, it is true; but he will fall back into sleep again. He has been raised as it were from the dead; but death will soon seize him again — if he has no life but that which springs up from within himself.

Let us see how it was with Paul after his conversion. Hear what he says in his own case, 'I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.' Hear what John says, 'He who has the Son has life; and he who has not the Son of God has not life.' And now let us hear what Christ Himself says, 'I am the Life,' 'the Resurrection and the Life;' 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life.' 'Because I live, you shall live also.'

Christ then is the Life of the renewed soul.

Look at one of those trees which casts its shade so pleasantly along our path. In summer how fresh and vigorous are its branches! And even in the dreary season of winter, when every bough seems dead — if you cut one, you will soon see there is life in it. Why? Because there is life and vigor in the stem. Or look at one of those strong steady arms that holds the plough, or fells the oak. Whence comes the power, the activity, the strength? It comes from the body, in which there is life and health. What would the branch be, if cut off from the tree? What could the arm do, if severed from the body? And so it is union with Christ, living upon Christ, that can alone make us growing, thriving, vigorous Christians. But do we not declare, in one of our Creeds, that the Holy Spirit is the great Life-giver to the soul? 'I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life!'

Yes, the gift is made over to us by Him. He it is who makes the heart to feel its utter deadness — and then leads us to the Savior for life and help. To be looking to Christ for grace, to be constantly stretching out the hand and heart to Christ for help, to be daily feeding upon Him — this is the secret of all our spiritual life, and of all our spiritual well-being. But let us for a few minutes consider what is the history of a person who has been brought under the influence of God's grace. Does he find Christ, and live upon Christ, at once? Is it a thing that he comes to immediately, and without any difficulty? Oh, no! The Holy Spirit usually begins His work by first showing us that we need a Savior. Do not mistake me — I would not for a moment have you suppose that God always works precisely in this way. He has many ways of bringing us to Christ. But this is perhaps His usual way of dealing with a soul, He first lifts up the veil, and shows us what we are. He reveals to us, what we could never have discovered ourselves — the sinfulness of our sin. We knew before that sin was an evil. When we saw it openly committed, we condemned it. And when we were invited to commit it ourselves, we at once shrank back. The life we led was outwardly correct perhaps. We did about as well as our neighbors, and that was enough for us. But we knew nothing of the sin that was all the while lying deep down in our hearts. Our guilt had not been brought home to us.

We had no feeling of concern for our soul. But at length God in mercy opened our eyes, and stuck His arrow in our hearts. And then how differently did we feel! Then we saw that the life we had been living was a useless, profitless one — and more than this, that it was a sinful one. We saw that our prayers had been no prayers at all; that our reading of Scripture had been a mere form; that our church-going had been a task and a toil; that God was an unknown God to us; that Christ was not really loved by us — in short, that we had been living for the world and not for Heaven, for time and not for eternity.

Oh, what a discovery! What a fearful discovery, you will say! Rather, what a blessed discovery — to know our danger and find it out in time to get deliverance!

It often happens, that for a season a man remains in this state. He feels himself to be a sinner. The thought of his sins is ever before him. It rests upon him, just as a black cloud sometimes hangs over us, and seems to linger in the sky above our heads. He is unhappy, very unhappy. He looks perhaps to the world to cheer him — but the world can do nothing for him. He feels its emptiness, its poverty. He sighs for peace. He looks for it in himself — but it is not there. He seeks in vain for deliverance. Ah, the wilderness seems bleak. The road seems very rough and difficult. The burden he is carrying is very heavy. He truly feels his need of salvation, and is anxious and eager to do anything to secure it. He tries perhaps all sorts of expedients, except the only true one.

Why does he not cast himself upon Christ? Why does he not rise and go to his Father, and acknowledge his guilt? He dares not go perhaps, because he has so greatly offended that Father; and he knows that He is a Father of mercies, and a God of love.

Why then does he not go to his Minister, and open his grief to him? Why does he not tell him of his troubles, and seek counsel of him? How gladly would he comfort him! How gladly would he lend an ear to all his difficulties, and perhaps point out a way of deliverance from them! But, it may be, he thinks that his case is different from any other case — that no one can feel just as he feels. And so he shrinks from laying bare his heart to any fellow-creature, and hides from every eye — the deep, aching wound within him.

I can imagine a person coming to church with his heart thus broken. I can imagine how differently he would feel from many, when the minister says, 'Let us pray.' Prayer would be a reality with him. Ah, he would kneel down, and open his very heart to God. Once he was content to sit at ease; there was no penitence then, no self-aborrence then — but now he feels that he can but fall upon his knees — it is the fitting posture for a heart-stricken sinner. And where can he find words more suited to his case, than those touching words with which we approach God in our Public Worship? 'Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from Your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against Your holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done — and we have done those things which we ought not to have done — and there is no health in us.'

Even this language is not too strong for him. He feels that there is literally 'no health' in him. And then those words that follow — how eagerly does he utter them! 'But You, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners. Spare them, O God, who confess their faults. Restore those who are penitent.'

Truly this is a golden prayer for a penitent soul. And that other too, in which we address God as One 'whose nature and property is ever to have mercy and to forgive,' is equally suitable to his state. And 'though we are tied and bound with the chain of our sins,' yet we entreat Him to 'let the pitifulness' (this is the language of one who feels that he has no plea to urge, but must throw himself on the compassion of his God) — we entreat Him to 'let the pitifulness of His great mercy loose us.'

I thank God that we have such prayers as these, and that we belong to a Church which like a tender mother, puts such earnest, lowly words into the lips of her children. This stage of Christian experience, which I have described, is painful while it lasts. But it is good for us to have our proud hearts bruised and broken by the Holy Spirit's influence. And He never leaves a soul long in this state. In time, the relief comes. 'Sorrow may endure for a night' — yes, and the night may be long and dark — 'but joy comes in the morning'

We learn to our comfort, that there is mercy for the lost, pardon for the guilty, rest for the weary — that Christ is the sinner's Remedy, and the sinner's Friend — that He is 'the Fountain opened for sin and impurity;' and that in Him there is 'redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of our sins.' But here again another difficulty often springs up. How can I get to this Savior? Will He hear me? Will He not reject me? Am I not too vile? Are not my sins too great, and of too long standing? Have I repented enough? Have I mourned enough? The Savior has received others — but will He receive me?

Such seems to be the state of mind described in Song of Solomon 3:1-11. In Song of Solomon 3:1-2 a seeking soul is described — a seeker who has not yet found the Savior — one who is on the search, but has not yet discovered the pearl of great price: 'By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but I found him not.' With the utmost anxiety and eagerness is this search carried on: 'I will rise now, and go about the city; in the streets and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but I found him not.' Again and again the mournful complaint is repeated, 'I sought him, but found him not!' In the third verse, the watchmen or ministers are described as finding the earnest inquirer, and helping him in his distress: 'The watchmen that go about the city found me; to whom I said, Have you seen Him whom my soul loves?' And then in the fourth verse, we see that promise fulfilled, 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find.' For the inquirer exclaims in the joy of his heart, 'It was but a little that I passed from them — and I found Him whom my soul loves.' Who can describe the joy of having found Christ? Blessed is the seeker after Him. 'Let the heart of them rejoice who seek the Lord.' But still more blessed are those who have found Him — who can say, 'My beloved is mine — and I am His!'

What a thought it is to be pardoned of all one's sins! to look upon God now as a loving Father! to see in Christ a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for every past transgression! But is this all? Is pardon all we need? Are the words, 'Your sins are forgiven,' all we need to hear? This is much, very much. But the forgiven sinner has now to travel along a new and heavenly road. He has been delivered from 'the low dungeon.' His fetters have been struck off him. He has been 'brought out of the horrible pit.' He has been cleansed from 'the miry clay.' He has been raised from the very dead — his grave-clothes have been stripped off. And now he has a new life before him — very different from his past life — a life of usefulness, a life of holiness, yes, and a life of happiness.

He now needs the same Savior who pardoned him, to be ever with him, to help him on his way, to keep his soul alive. As he has 'received Christ Jesus,' so he must now 'walk in Him.' He must run his Christian race, 'looking unto Jesus.' He must 'come out of the wilderness, leaning on his beloved.'

We are apt to think that all we need is to look to Christ as our Sin-bearer; and that, having once gone to Him in faith, and obtained forgiveness, the work is done.

What! is sin gone then forever? Does the Believer need no fresh renewal of the grant of pardon? Yes, he needs it daily, hourly. Then let us be continually looking to the Savior. Our place should be constantly at the foot of the cross, seeking to have our sins again and again washed away in the Redeemer's blood! Does not the Believer also need strength? He cannot fight by his own power. He cannot even walk alone. If he hopes to resist temptation, and to lead a holy life of service to his heavenly Master — if he wants boldly to come out from the world, and to stand forth as a decided follower of Christ — he must look to Jesus for daily grace to strengthen him.

Never suppose that you can become strong enough to do without Christ. Never imagine that you can reach such a point, that you are anything more than a poor, helpless being in your Savior's eyes. As you humbled yourself beneath His cross at the first, so continue to feel your place to be in the dust before Him, your righteousness to be as filthy rags, your strength as utter weakness. Be confident in Him; not in yourself. Trust in Him; not in your own attainment. Look upon Him as your all, as the Life of your soul. Go to Him in your emptiness, and receive daily out of His fullness.

Let me ask you, Do you truly love Christ? Is there a moving of your heart towards Him? Is He precious to your soul?

Many think they love Him. They mention Him with respect. They have a feeling in their minds that in some way or other, they are better off than if there was no Savior. But yet they cannot say that they do indeed love Him. They cannot exclaim with the Psalmist, 'There is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with You!' They hold no fellowship with Him. He is in truth as a stranger to their souls.

How different is this from the experience of a real child of God! He feels towards his Savior, as he feels towards none else. His language is, 'Who shall separate me from the love of Christ?' 'He loved me — and gave Himself for me!'

Again, have you found Christ? Happy those who, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, have been enabled to lay hold of Him, and are rejoicing in His salvation; who have made their choice, and taken Him as their portion! They are ready to say, 'Blessed be that grace, which subdued my unwilling heart, and drew me to my Savior; which conquered my love of the world, and won me over to Christ.'

'O happy day that fixed my choice

On You, my Savior and my God!

Well may this glowing heart rejoice,

And tell its rapture all abroad.'

But, if I mistake not, there are some who, although they cannot quite say this, yet are on the fair way to it. And so it may be with you. You have not found Christ — but you are earnestly seeking Him. A desire has sprung up in your heart which earthly things cannot satisfy — a desire which comes, not from yourself, but from God — a desire which savors not of nature, but of grace.

If this desire has a place within you, I thank God for it. And I pray that it may never leave you — but may grow stronger and stronger within you, until you also can say, 'I have found Him whom my soul loves!'

02.04. Living to God

04. Living to God

About three miles from here stands a building which has lately been erected with some care, and is just roofed in. That building is a little Church, where I trust in a few weeks a congregation of worshipers will be gathered.

What makes it a Church? Not the spot on which it is erected; for it stands on a rough, uncultivated heath. Not the materials of which it is built; for it is built of stone, and brick, and wood, of which ordinary houses are composed. But it will one day be a Church; because it will be solemnly set apart for the worship and service of God. It has been built with that intention, and will be used for that purpose. So it is with the Christian. He is one set apart for God. 'The Lord has set apart him who is godly for Himself.' The name of God is written, as it were, 'in his forehead.' He is 'a temple of the Holy Spirit.' He has given himself to the Lord. This was just what Paul felt, when he said, 'You are not your own; for you are bought with a price — therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.'

Once he thought he was at liberty to go his own way and to do his own will. But God had wrought a wondrous change in him. He had tasted of pardoning mercy. He had been brought under the influence of grace. He had learned the preciousness of Christ, and had thankfully embraced His salvation. And now he felt he was Christ's property, Christ's servant — a vessel naturally worthless, but mercifully 'fitted for the Master's use.' Speaking therefore of himself and his brethren, he says, 'None of us lives to himself, and no man dies to himself. For whether we live — we live unto the Lord; and whether we die — we die unto the Lord. Whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lord's.'

I spoke to you in the first chapter about living without God. God forbid that any one of us should be living thus!

I spoke to you in my next chapter about turning to God. God grant that many of us have turned to Him — may have taken the first decisive step towards a better course! And now let us give our best thoughts to the subject of the present chapter — Living to God. I shall take these three points —

How can we live to God?

Why should we live to God? When should we live to God?

1. HOW can we live to God?

We must live a different life from that of ordinary men. The little Church I spoke of stands amidst other houses — but yet it must not be considered as a common building. And so, if we would be God's people, we must feel differently and act differently, from many around us. None of us wish to be singular or odd. We would not court observation. But a really God-fearing person is forced to

take a line somewhat different from many about him. This is sometimes very painful — but it cannot be avoided. A pious child in a family, for instance, wishes to serve the Savior. And yet perhaps no one in the house feels as he feels. He meets with no encouragement, it may be — no sympathy — none to join him and help him in his happy, blessed course. This makes his way a very difficult one. Still he must be faithful to Christ, cost him what it may. A servant may stand almost alone among his fellow-servants. They may be for the world — he is for God. They are thinking how they may get on in life — he is anxious to get to Heaven. His feelings then and his actions must needs be very different from others. He has no wish to be singular — but he must be, or else deny his Lord. In a school, or in a house, or in a village, it is soon known who are the serious ones — who are the soldiers of Christ and the candidates for Heaven. Their conduct, their lives, their words soon tell the tale. Yes, depend upon it, those who were Christ's disciples in former times, were very unlike the careless ones around them. They were each one as a 'light' in the world, as 'a city set on a hill that cannot be hid.' And so it must be now. We cannot creep along the road to Heaven unobserved. We cannot be on the Lord's side — and yet pass unnoticed in the crowd. We cannot be Christ's disciples, without being liable to the charge brought against Peter, 'Surely you are also one of them — your speech betrays you!' Be prepared then, if you are the friend and follower of Christ, to take the line marked out for you in God's Word, though it may be the very opposite to that which others are following.

Further, there must be a separation from the world. God's children are in the world, but are not of the world. They are in the world — and therefore He would have them engage in its employments, discharge its duties, and take part in its occupations. In the seventeenth chapter of John, we find our Lord thus interceding for His people: 'I pray not that you should take them out of the world — but that you should keep them from the evil.' The religious laborer may labor still; and all the more heartily, because he is in the way of duty. The religious tradesman may still stand behind his counter; but there will be no underhand dealing, no leaded weights or shortened measures, but all his business will be done in the fear of God. It must and will be so, if he is a Christian man. The religious farmer too will still cultivate his land, still exercise the same watchful care, still exert the same industry and forethought. But he will do it in a different spirit. While he sows the seed, or looks after his flock — he will remember from whence comes the increase. His eye will be often turned to Him who can alone give the blessing. The child of God is not of the world. He has lost his greediness for its pleasures — for he has tasted of something better. He has lost his eager desire for gain — for he has won a prize, which exceeds all earthly treasures. He has lost his love for worldly company — for he has now a new and better Friend than this world ever gave him. The Christian is called to give up the world — that is, all that is sinful, all that is frivolous, all that draws away the heart from God.

You will say perhaps, Give us then some rule that we may follow, as to what we must give up! I cannot do it. No one can. Your own conscience must be your guide. The feelings of your own heart must sway you. The only thing like a rule which I can give you is this — and if you follow it, you will not be far wrong — 'Do nothing which you cannot kneel down and ask God's blessing. Go nowhere, where you would not wish Christ to find you.' I repeat it; for I feel that it may be useful to you through life: 'Do nothing which you cannot kneel down and ask God's blessing. Go nowhere, where you would not wish Christ to find you.' But I must go further, and say, that as regards our worldly occupations which are right in themselves — we must not follow them, so as to give our

whole hearts and souls to them. Important as they are, there is something more important. While many put earth's engagements above the call of God — while they are saying in their hearts, 'Business — you are my God; I devote myself to you,' — let our language be, 'This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press to wands the mark. I seek first the kingdom of God.'

It is quite clear from Scripture that we are required, and solemnly called upon as Christians, to give up the world. 'If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.' 'The friendship of the world is enmity with God.' 'Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.'

Again, we must deny ourselves for the Lord's sake. The Christian is called upon sometimes to do what is contrary to his own inclinations. He must learn then to deny himself. He must no longer do things, merely because they square with his own will — but because the Lord would have him do them. The faithful service of God often brings us into trouble. We often have to bear much, for His sake. We often have to act in a way that flesh and blood would shrink from. But shall we not do what our heavenly Father bids us do? Shall we not bear, what He sees well to lay upon us? Yes, and even rejoice in doing it; and thankfully and cheerfully bear it, at His bidding. When our own evil hearts then are ready to turn away from the task, or quake with fear — let us remember Him who said, 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.'

There must also be a bold, hearty, decided surrender of ourselves to the Lord.

There can be no living to God, where there is half-heartedness, wavering, or indecision. We must fearlessly face the world — and declare ourselves for Christ. There must be no hanging back, no fear of man's displeasure, no truckling to this person's arguments, or that person's fancies. Christ bids us come boldly forward as His servants, and we dare not hang back!

Ah, here is the trial. I know how difficult it is to take so strong and decided a step. And yet I am sure that thousands lose their peace of mind — lose God's favor — yes, and lose Heaven too — for lack of taking it.

I wish I could persuade you this day to leave the ranks of indifference, of indecision — may I not say, the ranks of cowardice? For I know that the conscience of many of you is now whispering, 'I ought to yield myself up at once to God.' I wish I could persuade you at this moment boldly and fearlessly to declare yourself for Christ, and to cast in your life with His people. May the Lord Himself 'draw you with the cords of a man, with the bands of love!'

Lastly, we must live a life of faith. 'We Christians walk by faith, not by sight.' 'We look not at the things which are seen and are temporal, but at the things which are not seen and are eternal.'

If your treasure is here in this poor world — then labor for it night and day; strive for it, as for a prize; grasp it with all eagerness. But if you wish for that better portion, which is promised you, and is yet to come — then pray for it, seek for it, live for it.

I trust you at times long for that better portion. There is a Friend for you above, out of sight, 'whom having not seen' you may 'love.' There is an Almighty Arm ready to shelter you — place yourself under its care. There is a Home before you — an eternal home — be ever looking towards it with

the unwavering eye of faith.

This, I believe, is what Scripture means by 'living unto the Lord':

a different life from that of others;

a separation from the world;

a denying of ourselves for Christ's sake;

a bold surrender of ourselves to the Lord;

and a life of faith.

Oh, that God may give us grace to choose such a life as this — and having chosen it, never to waver in our choice!

There are two other inquiries, which I shall touch upon very briefly.

2. WHY should we thus live to God? We are not our own, but His. He made us. He preserves us. We are in His hands. To Him we owe our strength, our health, our lives. But still more — we owe to Him our salvation. He loved us, and sent His Son to die for us. We have been bought by His precious blood. 'He died for all, that those who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him.' That Church on the heath, of which I spoke just now, is no longer man's property — it is God's house. And so the Christian is not his own, but the Lord's. He has consecrated himself to the Lord's service.

If we felt this more — 'I am not my own, but Christ's — not my own, to live for myself, but Christ's, to live for Him' — then how differently would we feel and act! Our life would be one entire consecration to our Master's service. Our constant inquiry would be, 'How can I please Him? How can I do His will? How can I glorify Him in my body, and in my spirit, which are His?'

Remember, He who is your great Creator, to whom you owe your very life — your Protector, who has guarded you up to this hour — your Father, who so tenderly loves you — He says to you, Give Me — not your money, not your health, not your strength, not your words — but give Me something in which I am more interested still; my son, give Me your heart! And can you refuse to give it?

He who is your Savior too, who has loved you as no brother ever loved you; who has stretched Himself on the cross for you; who has drunk the bitter cup of suffering for your sake! He says, 'I stand at the door and knock.' Oh, will you not let Him in? Will you not say, 'Other lords beside You have had dominion over me; but I desire henceforth to give my heart, my life, myself, to You.' And now, a word or two on the question, 3. WHEN shall we live unto God? To this I answer without hesitation, Now, today, this very hour! The time past of our lives suffices to have lived to ourselves and to the world. Now begin to live to God. Why not?

What! Would you have young men and women, just entering on the joys of life give themselves to God? Would you have those who are in health and strength, with probably a long life before them — would you have them turn their backs on the world, and enter upon Christ's service? Yes, certainly I would!

We cannot too soon begin a life of such joy and blessedness. Why not? Are the world's bonds too strong to break? Is self too dear to be given up? Is the heart so fondly set on things below? Has it clung to them so long that it is unwilling to break away from them now, and enjoy those better things which God has to give? Oh, take care lest death comes and finds us living a selfish, unprofitable, worldly life!

I feel that the great end of this book will not be gained, unless it leads you to stand out from the world, and to be really anxious to lead godly and heavenly lives.

I am thankful if you are quiet and respectable; if you go to church, and sometimes to the Holy Table. But I want more. I want to see sin forsaken, and Jesus my Savior loved and honored. I want to see you crowding into the narrow way — pressing onward with a firm and joyous step. I want to see you asking the way to Zion with your face thitherward, determined by God's help to live as an earnest, faithful, and consistent follower of Christ.

God grant that you may one day — ah, this day — take up the language of the Apostle, and say, 'Whether I live — I will live unto the Lord; and whether I die — I will die unto the Lord; whether living therefore or dying, I will be the Lord's!'

02.05. The Great Work of Life

05. The Great Work of Life Our Lord's life on earth was the great pattern life. Even in the days of His childhood, He worked for His heavenly Father. Those early years were spent with His earthly Parents principally at Nazareth. Picture to yourself a Child, much like other children, year by year growing in wisdom and in stature; strictly following the wishes of Joseph and Mary; working at their trade, as 'the Carpenter's Son' — a sinless Child, a pattern of holiness, and perfectly pure in heart and life. At the age of twelve, His Parents took Him with them, to attend the great Feast of the Passover, according to the custom of the Jews. It was usual on those occasions for several families to join together for safety, and to travel in company. Those Passover days must have been happy and solemn seasons; for there was much in them to remind the people of God of His past goodness to them, and of mercies yet to come. The Feast being ended, the different companies gather together, and leave the city with their faces turned again towards their respective homes. The little party from Nazareth is among the rest. But Jesus is not with them. So great, however, was the "crowd, that it was not until the close of the first day's journey, that His Parents discovered that He was missing; for they supposed all the while that He was in the company, among their kinsfolk and acquaintances. As soon as they found it out, they hastened back to Jerusalem with the greatest concern. And there, in the midst of the Temple, to their surprise they beheld Him surrounded by a group of learned men called Doctors, or Teachers of the Law. There He was, with these venerable Elders hanging upon His lips, and hearing from Him such words as no child had ever uttered before. His Mother at once addresses Him in language of affectionate remonstrance, 'Son, why have you thus dealt with us? Behold, your father and I have sought You sorrowing.' As much as to say, 'You have never before caused us a single pang. The hearts of other parents have been sometime grieved — but our hearts never experienced a moment's sorrow on Your account. What has called You away from us now?' This question drew forth those remarkable words, 'Why is it that you sought Me? Do you not know that I must be about my Father's business?'

Then in the eye of Jesus, there is a higher work than that which concerns this world. There is a Father in Heaven, a Master above, who has a stronger claim upon us even than our earthly father, or our earthly master.

How much we may learn from this heavenly Child! We know not what were the words He spoke to those aged Jewish doctors; but these few simple words addressed to His Parents contain a most instructive sermon in themselves. May we listen to it, and may it have a resting-place in our hearts!

Truly we have each of us some great work to do for God. What is it? Did you ever watch a swarm of bees on a warm summer's day? All the members of that busy throng are employing themselves. Some may be seen flying quickly through the air, in search of flowers from which to gather their harvest. Others are seen returning homewards with a goodly store of gathered honey. They enter the crowded hive, and deposit their burden; but there is no confusion. Others, again, may be seen building up the little cells, each one beautifully shaped according to the truest rule. And a few are

posted near the entrance, fanning the air with their wings, for the sake of those within, who would otherwise be exhausted with their labor.

Here is a picture of God's Church, or Family on earth. He would have us all to be workers, busy in His service, laboring for Him, employed in the great work of His kingdom.

Why are we sent here? Is it to be idlers? Is it to do our own work, and to follow our own ways? Is it to labor only for the food which perishes, to toil here for a few years for this world's pay, and then to pass away, and be forgotten?

No, we have a nobler calling, a better portion than this. We must not leave the work of this world undone. The laborer, the tradesman, the farmer, all of us have our earthly duties to discharge. 'If a man will not work — then neither let him eat.' It would indeed be a mistake, if the laborer were to leave the plough, because God had called him into His service; or if the tradesman were to neglect his customers, on the plea that his soul must be cared for; or if the farmer were to let the weeds grow in his fields, and his fallows remain unsown, because he has a God to serve, and a soul to be saved.

Thank God, He is no such hard Master! Instead of this, He bids us to labor, and makes our very labor a means by which we may truly serve Him. We need not go out of the world to do His work. We shall serve Him most effectually if we carry our Christianity into the every-day occupations of life. How many there are in the world, who are always wishing to be useful — always intending to do something for God — often dreaming what they might do, if they were in such and such circumstances. And yet, if they would but begin by doing something that is close to their hands, it would indeed be well. There is work enough before us, without looking elsewhere. Are we Parents? We shall be doing God's work, if we train up our children for Him. Are we Masters? We shall be serving God, if for His sake we are kind and considerate, and watchful over those who are placed under our care by Him. Are we servants? Is labor our calling? God will accept our work, if we do it cheerfully and faithfully as unto the Lord, and not to man. But over and above our earthly work, there is a special work to do for God; or rather I would say, while doing the lower work of earth — there is a higher, a nobler, a far greater work to be done for the Lord. He can employ us, if we have only the heart to be employed.

What shall we say then of those who spend their life in idleness, seeking their own pleasure, and wasting their precious moments on themselves; or of those who are busy and active, but it is about their own gain, or their own advancement in the world? They may be harmless and inoffensive in their lives, and the world may pronounce them to be useful persons; but both the one and the other are in God's sight mere cumberers of the ground.

Now, WHAT is the work He would have us to do? The work of a Minister is plain enough — to preach the glad tidings of salvation — to explain to men God's Word and will — to care for souls, and to labor if by any means he may win them to Christ. This is the solemn work which is laid upon them. And truly if men should wish to draw them aside from it, they might well answer in the words of Nehemiah, 'I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. Why should the work cease, while I leave it?' But all are not Ministers. And yet God has just as special a work for you to do in the world as for them. The Church of Christ is like that bee hive. And if we really belong to it, there is an important task for each of us, and we shall certainly be doing it. The lowest and the least has

a place allotted to him by the Lord — and happy for him if he is earnestly filling it. For example, one may go and stand by the bedside of some afflicted neighbor, and speak to him comforting words of tenderness and truth. In so doing you will be showing your love to Him who said, 'I was sick, and you visited me.' This is a Christian work, and a work which more would gladly engage in, if their hearts glowed with the love of souls. 'Pure and undefiled religion is this, to visit the widows and fatherless in their affliction, and keep himself unspotted from the world.'

Another may feel able to speak boldly for Christ, wherever he goes. He will not speak rashly — so as to bring religion into contempt, or proudly — as if he were better and wiser than others. But he will speak humbly, under a deeper sense of his own unworthiness. And thus he will try, as far as in him lies, to win men into Christ's service. A third may not be able to say much. He may often long to speak; but his courage fails him. He has often prayed perhaps that he may be able; but the power is withheld. Still he may be useful, very useful, even more useful perhaps than one who has a readier tongue. He may speak by his life! He may draw others into the fold by his holy and consistent conduct!

What shall I say more? There are a thousand ways by which we may be doing God's work, and furthering His cause in the world. The person who teaches a little group of Sunday-school children, from love to the Savior — the person who counts it no trouble to go around a parish, to collect funds for sending the Gospel to the heathen — even the poor sufferer who is cut off from fellowship with the world, but who, as he lies upon his sick bed, prays earnestly and constantly for his brethren, that the Gospel may reach their hearts — these, and many more, are really doing God's work, and are fulfilling the task to which He has called them.

Surely God gives to all some opportunity of being useful. He may give to some but one talent, and to others ten. But He looks as graciously on him who has the one, if he employs that one rightly, as He does on him who has the ten. Yes, there are none among us, none so poor, none so young, none so unlearned, none so occupied, but that they may do something for their heavenly Master, and for His people. Is there any Drunkard whom you have anything to do with? Try and stop him in his downward course. Don't say, It is not my work. It is your work, if God gives you the opportunity. And though you may fail, as we often do, still He will accept your endeavor. Is there any one of your acquaintance thoughtless and careless? Beware lest you encourage that person in sin, by your silence, when you might say something to him, which by God's blessing would do him good. Is any one a neglecter of God's house? Use every effort to bring him with you into your Savior's presence. He may be blessed there, and you may save his soul.

I feel sure that each one of us has some influence over his brother. Depend upon it, we never come into a person's company — but we either do him good, or we do him harm. We may not perceive it at the time. The effect may be very small. So is the effect of a drop of rain, or a flake of snow, or a gleam of sunshine on the corn; but many such drops, and flakes, and gleams, have a wondrous influence on the coming harvest.

Just reflect how very different is the influence which two men may have in their ordinary course through life.

One perhaps is a hard man of the world. He attends regularly to his business. He is up early. He never idles. There is no loitering along the way. His mind is set on gain; and therefore, if anything

crosses his plans, it frets and irritates him. Every now and then a word will fall from his lips, which but too plainly shows that God is not in all his thoughts. If he goes into company, his remarks are rather against religion than for it. If anything is going on in his parish for the good of souls, or for the glory of God, he either opposes it, or passes it by in silence.

Think you, that such a man's influence can do no harm? It must do harm. We feel that it has done us harm, when we have been thrown in with one of this stamp. But how different is the course of another person who carries into daily life the character and bearing of a Christian. His mind is calm and peaceful; and scarcely anything ruffles it. He has a kind word for everyone. He is ready for every good work. If it be a right thing, he will at once lend a hand in forwarding it. He is not content to leave it to others, or to consider how he may avoid it with decency, but he is thankful to take part in it himself. If God has set him in a place of authority, he is anxious to promote the welfare, both bodily and spiritual, of those who are under him. If he is in a lower station, he will remember that he has an earthly — and a heavenly, Master; and while he does the work of the one, he will not leave the work of the other undone. If he happens to be thrown among strangers, he will feel that the eye of his God is upon him; and, like a true-hearted soldier, he will not be ashamed to show his colors. Wherever he is, and whatever he is doing, he will not forget his 'Father's business.'

What a vast difference between the two — the one constantly grieving his heavenly Father, and doing some little amount of harm to his fellow-men; the other scattering blessings wherever he goes. The one living most effectually to God; the other living without Him in the world. Which will you be? May God give you grace to live, and act, and speak for Him, so long as life is spared to you! And now, in bringing this subject to a close, I will once more call your attention to the words which I alluded to at the beginning of the chapter. Our Lord calls that higher work of which we have been speaking, His Father's business, "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"

Now, it was not the great work of atonement that Jesus spoke of here. Neither was it the work of His ministry. For He did not come forth into public until eighteen years after this. But he speaks of Himself as a Son and Servant of God. And He felt that the work of God was His work, and that the great business before His mind was His "Father's business."

Let this same feeling be ever in our minds. And while many are putting earth's business above the calls of God — while they are saying in their hearts, "Worldly business — be my God! I devote myself to you!" — let us remember that we have a great and glorious work to do for our Father in Heaven, and let us be ever ready to do it. The ability will be given us, and the power too, if we entreat God to bestow it upon us. Yes, and life will be sweetened by the thought that we are doing something for Him, who has done so much for us. It is my heavenly Father, to whom I am indebted for all I am, and all I have. I live under His daily care. My soul is in His hourly keeping. I walk with Him day by day. I hope to dwell with Him forever. Oh, do not wonder that I desire to do His will and be pleasing unto Him. "Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?"

You and I shall soon be laid down upon our death-beds. And as we look back on the long past, we shall probably feel that there is much (oh, how much!) that we have done amiss. Many sins we shall then remember — which need a Savior's blood to purge. But this is not all. Shall we not also feel that there is much that we have left undone — that we might have been more useful in our day — that we have neglected many golden opportunities? How very few of us will be able to say, 'I

have finished the work which You gave me to do! I have labored for You; I have spoken for You; I have acted for You; I have lived for You!

We came into the world to do — not to dream. Let us then arouse ourselves. Let us be workmen for Christ. There is a great work to be done for Him in the world, and but very few to do it. Let us be among those few. And then too we have but a little while to work in. Our days are getting shorter and shorter. The night will soon come when no more work can be done.

Now, our Father is saying to us, 'Son, work today in my vineyard.' Soon He will say, 'Son, give an account of your stewardship, for you may be no longer steward — your work-day has closed forever!'

Years ago, when you came into the world, God sent you on a special errand — and that errand was to glorify Him. To this end you were born, and for this cause you came into the world. Now, how have you fulfilled the end for which He sent you? Perhaps not at all. You may have prospered. Your life may have been one great success. But one day You will perhaps discover that you have altogether missed the end for which God destined you. And oh, what a bitter pang will it be to find that you have lived altogether in vain! But I trust that this may not be the case with you. May you be one of those whose earnest desire it is to serve Christ, and humbly to do the work to which He has called you.

02.06. The Great End of Life!

06. The Great End of Life!

What is the great end of life? What is the one chief object which the Christian should have ever before him?

If one who had never mixed with his fellow-men were to come among us, what would be the impression upon his mind? If he went into the streets of London, or into any of our manufacturing towns — what would he say of the men and women whom he met with? He would see that they are busy, they are active, they are striving for something. Their very countenances show an eagerness about their pursuits. They are up early; they are in bed late; they work hard. And, upon inquiry, he would find that all this is for Gain. The end their minds are fixed on is to get money. Or if he fell in with some of the rich and noble of the land, he would see that many of them are only thinking how they can make a merriment of life — how they can while away their days and hours in amusement. Then he would come to the conclusion that Pleasure is the great end of life, the great object to live for. Or if he went to one of our Universities, he would find men, old and young, engaged in study — poring over their books perhaps for eight or ten hours in the day. From this he would gather that Learning is the great end of life. Or if he mixed among our Soldiers and Sailors, and listened to their conversation, he would come away with the idea that earthly Honor and Glory is the great thing to live for. Or suppose he came into one of our country villages, he would observe whole families dependent on their labor, earning their bread by the sweat of their brow, and entirely trusting to their weekly wages. And he would be led to imagine that Getting a living is the great aim of life.

Too true it is that a large portion of mankind have no further end in view, than gain, or pleasure, or learning, or earthly glory, or mere subsistence. But we must acknowledge that these are but a poor aim for one who has an immortal soul, for one who at the first was created in God's image.

What then ought to be the end and object for which we are living? Is it Pardon? We are coming nearer to it now. Well may the awakened penitent long for pardon. Well may he feel that to be rid of that heavy burden of sin would be his greatest happiness. Well may he sigh for it, as the prisoner sighs for liberty. And, when he obtains it, well may he rejoice with a joy he never felt before. But yet there is a higher end than this that the pardoned Christian may be looking for, and longing for. What is it? Perhaps it is Heaven. This is a blessed and noble object to have in view — to live for Heaven; to have our eye ever turned towards that blessed abode, which we shall share forever with the Lord Himself! Yes, to secure our own salvation; to win Heaven for ourselves; to be safe for eternity; to have a firm, bright, joyous hope as regards the future; this is unspeakably important to each one of us. But if this is our only object, or even our ruling object in life — then is there not something almost selfish in our aim? Thank God there is one higher and nobler still. And that is to glorify God.

Look at our great Pattern. Look at Him who, when He became man, became a perfect man. Now, from the very dawn of our Lord's earthly existence, to the hour when His life closed in — all was one continual glorifying of God. He was always doing the will of Him who sent Him. He was always about His Father's business. Again and again we find such words as these coming from His lips, 'I seek not my own glory.' 'I honor my Father.' Watch Him at the grave of Lazarus. This object was foremost on His mind. With thus view He raised the dead corpse to life. Hear how He speaks to Martha, 'Did not I say unto you, that, if you would believe, you should see the glory of God?' When the hour of His own sufferings drew near, He exclaimed, 'Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say — Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify your name.' And again, 'I have glorified you on the earth — I have finished the work which you gave me to do.' This is the great errand too, on which the Angels loved to be employed. How did the air ring with their joyful song, on the first Christmas morn, when they proclaimed, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men!' And such too has been the great and constraining object for which many a Believer has lived. What is the one motive which has led hundreds of God's servants to give their money, their time, their strength, their hearts to Him? It is the desire to bring glory to His name. This was the secret of Paul's earnestness. This made him labor, and strive, and fight. This made him willing to bear shame, reproach, and suffering — yes, and even to count his very life not dear unto himself. If he could only promote His Master's glory, he felt himself abundantly repaid. He was content to be despised, so that Christ might be honored. He was willing to be abased, if only His Lord might be exalted. I hardly know such noble feelings uttered by anyone, as those which Paul expressed in writing to the Philippians — such entire putting down of self — that the kingdom of Christ, and His glory, might be advanced. 'But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. In nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain!' And what are the feelings that he recommends to his Christian brethren? Just the same feelings — nothing lower.

'You are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.' And again, 'Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.' So then, you see, this should be the great end and object of the Christian's life — to glorify God.

Let me now put this matter before you in such a way that you may act upon it. I will offer you some directions, and mention some ways in which you may glorify God.

1. Try and wean yourself from all self-glorifying. Even where there is grace in the heart, we have need to be on our guard. Self is forever endeavoring to get the upper hand. The old Adam — our old nature — is constantly striving to exalt itself. Like Diotrephes, we 'love to have the preeminence.' We are continually wishing to be something more than Christ would have us to be. Oh, let us curb this desire, and be willing to be nothing for Christ's sake.

We ministers know perhaps more than any, what this temptation is. To get a name for earnestness in our sacred calling — to behave ourselves nobly before our people — to win their applause — to acquire a certain amount of popularity — these desires are forever creeping in, and filling the place

of purer and higher motives. Yes, and we may deceive ourselves, and imagine that we are doing God's work, and glorifying Him — when in fact we are only glorifying ourselves!

It is related of two Ministers, who had separate charges in London, both seemingly devoted to their work, and both preaching earnest and stirring sermons, that they made this agreement — that, whichever of them should die first, the spirit of the departed one should return, and declare to his Friend what was the sentence passed upon him and his work in the Lord's vineyard.

After a while one of the two died; and it is said that his spirit returned and appeared to the survivor. And when asked if he was now in the peaceful enjoyment of Paradise, reaping the reward of his abundant labors, 'No' (he replied), 'I am lost. I am cast away. I have been weighed in the balance, and found lacking.' 'Why?' it was asked. 'Was not your preaching true and faithful? Were you condemned for anything you said as God's messenger?' 'Oh no, it was not my words that were wrongly spoken; it was not my preaching that was lacking in energy or boldness; it was not my activity that lacked. But this it was — that, while I seemed to preach Christ, I was really preaching myself! It was my own good name, my own praise, my own glory, that I sought. The preaching of the cross was only the cloak that covered my empty profession of devotedness. And now that that cloak is torn away, I am left naked and stripped of all, and I must go down a soul-deceiver and a self-deceiver into Hell!'

Though we cannot for a moment believe this narrative to be true, yet there is a point in it which may come home with searching power to all our hearts. Let us keep self in the background; and be often questioning ourselves, 'Do I act from a proper motive? Am I wishing to gain a name among men — or to advance the glory of my God?'

2. Set God's glory distinctly before you in all you do. I am to glorify God — this is the great end which I am to live for. Perhaps we have never thought of this. Perhaps we have never done a single thing in our whole lives from this grand and glorious motive. We have acted oftentimes from a desire to do what is right — from a sense of duty, or from a feeling of kindness and love, or from a wish to be useful. But how seldom have we done a thing from a simple desire to glorify God. And yet this is the highest and most blessed motive from which a Christian can act. This is doing as Christ did, and feeling as He felt.

Peter, speaking of our gifts, bids us to use them, 'that God in all things may be glorified' — not in one thing, but in 'all things' — not in great things merely, but in little things as well. And Paul goes still further, for he says, 'Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do — do all to the glory of God.' That is, in all the little actions of your daily life, let this one motive be the mainspring of all your doings — to bring glory to Him!

3. Endeavor to honor God by the holiness of your life. Nothing brings such dishonor upon the Gospel, and nothing leads to such contempt for the truth — as the unholy lives of His professing people. And, on the other hand, nothing is so pleasing to Him, and brings such honor to His name and cause — as the holy lives of His followers.

We Christians are called with a holy calling. We are called to be like Jesus, holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. I often picture to myself a little band of holy men and women in any church — a compact band, a loving band, a devoted band, of really consistent Christians; not mere professors — but possessors of Christ; not talkers — but workers; not hearers only —

but doers of the Word — fruit-bearers, light-reflectors, living epistles of Christ, known and read of all men. What a blessed influence would they have on others; like leaven, spreading itself over the whole mass; like fragrant ointment, scattering around the perfume of godliness! This would give life to our Churches. This would put to silence the gainsayer. This would attract, and win over, the unbeliever.

Paul speaks of our 'adorning the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.' What a word that is — adorning the doctrine! Can we add anything to that which is in itself so pure, and bright, and lovely, as the Gospel? Alas, we oftener throw a veil over it, and dim its beauties — we cast upon it many a blot, and so mar its charms. And yet we may adorn the Gospel, we may add a luster to it, by living under its power. What more lovely picture is there in the world, than to see a holy and happy Christian acting out the Gospel in all he does?

Oh, let us try to make religion attractive by the blamelessness of our lives. Let us show forth the character of Christ in our daily conduct. Why is it that our Lord exhorts us to let our light shine before men? It is that they may be led, by seeing our good works, not to praise us, but 'to glorify our Father which is in Heaven.' And, believe me, the poorest and humblest may do this. We may all let our light shine for Christ. For do we not see the glorious sun reflected on the little tiny dew-drop, as well as on the boundless ocean? 'Herein,' says Christ, 'is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit.'

4. Make it a subject of prayer that you may glorify God. We are taught to ask this in the pattern prayer which Jesus has given us. There, out of the seven petitions which we are taught to offer, we plead in three of them for our Father's glory:

'Hallowed be Your name.'

'May Your kingdom come.'

'May Your will be done.' So too in our Prayer Book, we ask again and again for this very thing; 'Grant that we may evermore serve You in holiness and pureness of living, to Your honor and glory.' Again, in praying for our Queen, we ask, 'that she may above all things seek God's honor and glory.' And for Parliament, 'that God would be pleased to direct and prosper all their consultations to the advancement of His glory.' And then, more than once in the Service, our lips pour forth those few but stirring words of praise, 'Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit.'

Seek then to glorify God. It is He who has placed us where we are — who has appointed our lot for us. He has put us where we may best glorify Him — where we can do a work for Him, which we could not do elsewhere. We may glorify Him by patiently bearing whatever He is pleased to lay upon us — by cheerfully submitting to His will in all things. We may do so by our words, by our prayers, by our faith, by a holy and Christian life.

One cannot but respect a son who has his father's honor at heart. One cannot but admire a soldier who would rather die than disgrace his country. And if we are worthy of the name of sons — shall we not seek our heavenly Father's honor? If we are true soldiers of Christ — shall we not desire above all things our Savior's glory?

Let us determine to make this our constant aim. Let us be ever striving to do something for our God. The glory of His name, the honor of His cause, the advancement of His kingdom — oh, here is something indeed worth striving for! Let the world frown upon us; let our riches take to themselves wings and fly away; let poverty be our lot here; let us be counted as nothing in the estimate of our fellow-men: no matter, if we can, each of us in our little measure, adorn the doctrine of God our Savior, and advance His glory in the world.

02.07. The Word of God, the Nutriment of the Christian Life

07. The Word of God, the Nutriment of the Christian Life In the preceding chapters I have dwelt principally on the nature of the Christian Life. I have shown you what it is to live without God. I have called your attention to the great Turning-point in the Christian Life. I have directed you to Christ, as the Center of that Life — Himself the very life of the soul. I have described to you what it is to live to God; and what is the great work, and also the chief end and object of the Christian Life. In the next four chapters, I shall show you how this life is sustained and kept up in the soul. And I shall speak first of the Word of God, as the Nutriment of this spiritual life. May God help me to speak wisely and usefully.

God has called us to live to Him; and He has made our happiness to consist in doing so. Ten thousand are the ways by which He brings us from death unto life — by the voice of conscience; by the gentle working of His Spirit; by the preaching of His Word; by some startling visitation; by some arrow, shot perhaps at a venture, but directed to the heart by the Lord Himself. Yes, He has not one method merely, but many, for raising a soul from the cold grave of sin and worldliness — to the resurrection life of grace. But God does not leave us there. Lazarus, when a new life was granted to him, needed food to support his bodily frame — just so do we need spiritual support. And God has specially provided it. Among those means of grace, which He has mercifully appointed, His Word stands first and foremost, as the food and nourishment of the renewed soul.

Let us consider the subject under these three heads:

- I. The Word of God is the appointed means of our spiritual instruction.
 - II. That Word must be received into the soul, as its daily nourishment.
 - III. When so received, it brings joy and rejoicing to the heart.
- I. The Word of God is the appointed means of our instruction.

1. God would have us KNOW Him. Suppose we had been brought up without any instruction from our Parents, without a Minister to teach us, or without a Bible to make the truth of God known to us — what would be our state? We would know nothing of God, nothing of a Savior, nothing of the eternal world. We might have a feeling of need in our hearts — which nothing here could satisfy; a feeling of emptiness — which nothing here could fill. We might guess that there was a God above; and conscience might tell us that we have wronged Him, and strayed from His ways. But where could we look for pardon? Where could we find the desired atonement? We could know nothing of the Cross, nothing of a Savior who has died, 'the just for the unjust, to bring us to God.' Something within might tell us that there is a world to come — but how dark and uncertain would be our views concerning it!

Blessed be God, He has revealed these things to us. He has made Himself known to us in His own Word. There we may read of His love in giving us a Savior; and there we are told of that Savior dying for us, and of His having gone before us to prepare a place for His elect. The Bible teaches

us to know God and Jesus whom He has sent. It is true that the mere head-knowledge of this will not save us; but if God gives us His Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds, and to touch our hearts — then, as we read His Word, we shall get to know Him, to our comfort, peace, and salvation.

2. God would also have us OBEY Him. He is the Lord and Master of the world. And it is just in proportion as we obey Him that we shall be happy. Surely, if we are God's people, our grand inquiry will be how we may do His will — how we may serve Him most effectually — how we may please Him. And where can we learn this? There is no voice from Heaven now, saying to us on every occasion, 'It shall be told you what you must do.' God does not send His angels to us, as He did to Jacob or to Manoah. He does not declare His mind to us in a vision, as He did to Paul. He does not send a special messenger to us, as He did to King Hezekiah, or to Cornelius the Centurion. All His counsel is written in that sacred Book which we possess. And as we read that Book, we may discover in its pages directions for a holy and a happy life.

3. God would have us also to LOVE Him. And how can we love Him, except we know Him? And how can we show our love, but by obeying Him? 'If you love me,' says our Lord, 'keep my commandments.'

We are to love a Father whom we have never beheld — and an unseen Savior. But there, in the Bible, we have His glorious character placed before us. There we may see what He is, and what He has done for us. And thus our affections are drawn out, and our hearts won over to Him.

Let anyone read his Bible earnestly and with prayer, and his heart cannot but burn within him, as he pictures to himself the goodness, and mercy, and love of his Almighty Friend. And the more God's truth lays hold of his heart — the deeper and warmer will be his affection to Christ, who has done so much, and suffered so willingly for his sake. 'We love Him — because He first loved us.' Do you find it hard to love God, to love the Savior — hard to lift your leaden heart from off the soil of this world, and to soar upwards on the wings of gratitude? Read some passage in the Gospels or elsewhere, at the same time uttering a heartfelt prayer for a blessing; and, though you may have read the passage many times before, God can and will make it the means of giving fresh tenderness and fervor to your heart.

II. This Word must be received into your soul as its daily nourishment. Our souls must be fed, as well as our bodies — and I have shown that God has provided for this. He has given His Word to be the spiritual food of the new-born soul, 'that we may grow thereby.'

Now food is of no use to the body, unless it is inwardly received by us. There may be an abundance of food in our country; there may be ample provisions in our houses — but if we do not feed upon them, we shall starve. So it is with God's Word. We may have the Bible on our shelves. It may be near us. We may see it day by day. We may even read it with our eyes. And yet our souls may not be nourished. They may starve in the midst of plenty.

God's Word must sink below the surface, down into our very hearts. 'The entrance of your words,' says David, 'gives light; it gives understanding to the simple.' And again, 'Your word have I hid in my heart.'

What did the Prophet Jeremiah do with God's Word? First he tells us that he found it, 'Your words were found.' Have you found God's Word to be the most precious treasure you can possess? You

have had it within your reach all your life — but have you discovered its value? A friend of mine was the possessor of a large tract of land. To the outward eye it seemed much like other land. But one day a bed of metal called manganese was discovered in one of his fields. From that moment the value of the field was increased twenty-fold. The rich mine had existed there all along — but he knew it not.

Perhaps it has been so with your Bible. Once you had it in your possession without knowing its value. But now you have found it out, to your exceeding joy! That was a great discovery which is mentioned in 2 Kings 22:1-20, where we are told that Hilkiah the Priest found in some old chest belonging to the Temple, a copy of the law of Moses, which had been lost for years, and well-near forgotten. He goes immediately to Shaphan the scribe, and says, 'I have found the Book of the law in the House of the Lord!' Shaphan eagerly read it himself; and then took it to the King, and read some passages of it aloud to him. Good King Josiah knew well its value, and prized it accordingly.

Martin Luther, too, the great German Reformer, who lived three hundred and fifty years ago, when we were all under the dark cloud of Romanism — one day was groping about in the library of his convent, and is said to have come accidentally upon a copy of the Bible. It was to him as bread to the hungry. He feasted his soul upon it; and God brought it home to his inmost heart. That again was a great discovery. And so too in these days, when it pleases God by His Spirit to awaken any one — then the Bible becomes as it were a new book. The soul hungers for God's truth, and there it finds the nourishment it needs. But Jeremiah tells us another thing. 'Your words were found,' he says, 'and I ate them.' He fed upon them to the satisfying of his soul.

Look upon God's Word in this light — as your spiritual nourishment. Say to yourself, 'I need enlightening, comforting, strengthening. I will sit down to the reading of Scripture as I would to my meal. I will ask God to bless me, and feed me with this bread of life.'

You can use no better petitions than those of our well-known Collect, 'Blessed Lord, who has caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning — grant that we may hear them, read them, mark them, learn them, and inwardly digest them.' Our ordinary food, when swallowed, must be digested; and so must the words of Scripture. We must think over them, meditate upon them, and let them sink down into our hearts.

I believe that our Bible-reading would be a very different thing, if we came to it in this spirit. What is it to many of us? A mere task, a dry, uninteresting duty which we feel it right to go through. No wonder that such people find no benefit from their reading. They have no appetite for God's Word, and therefore they cannot say, 'Your words were found, and I ate them — and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart!' Jeremiah 15:16

Remember, then, it must be your constant daily nourishment. When anyone says, 'I read my Bible sometimes' — I can guess pretty well the state of that person's soul. What! brethren, is it so with your ordinary meals? Do you sit down to them only sometimes? Do you let your dinner-hour or your supper-hour pass by, because you have other things to do? Do you ever spend a day without food, and yet not so much as notice it? If so, you cannot be in health. There must be something wrong with you!

Just so, if you have no appetite for God's Word, if you do not feel that your soul longs for this spiritual nourishment — all cannot be right with you. There cannot be health within. If all was well

with your soul, you would sooner suffer a famine of food, or a thirst of water — than of reading or hearing the Word of the Lord. A real love for the Bible, a hungering for its truths which nothing but a constant daily reading of it will satisfy — this is a sure sign of a converted soul.

Read the Bible then every day. Have your fixed hour for it, as you would for any one of your meals. Read it with earnest prayer for the teachings of the Spirit. Ask God to make it a nourishing word to you. This is the kind of reading that will do you good. Thus will your soul thrive.

III. The Word, when so received, brings joy and rejoicing to the heart. I referred just now to Jeremiah. Well he had 'eaten' — or fed upon, God's words. And what was the effect they produced upon his soul? Did this spiritual meal answer his expectation, or disappoint him? Hear what he says, 'Your word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart!' This was his testimony. And such too was David's. He also ate the same spiritual food. And what is his account of it? 'How sweet are your words unto my taste! Yes, sweeter than honey unto my mouth!' And Job's experience is the same, 'I have esteemed the words of your mouth more than my necessary food.'

Imagine yourself for a moment in the deserts between Jerusalem and Gaza. You see a man coming along in his chariot, and reading as he travels. He is very thoughtful. The Book he is intent upon is deeply interesting to him. He is an Eunuch of Ethiopia; and he is reading a portion of the Prophet Isaiah. Presently one joins him, to whom that Book is familiar. He explains it to him. The Eunuch now sees that it speaks of Christ. At once a new light breaks in upon him. A new rill of joy is opened in his soul. He believes, and 'goes on his way rejoicing.' Or again, imagine yourself in one of our English prisons some three hundred years ago. There you would have seen a venerable man, a Minister of Christ, bound under sentence of death; a prisoner of the Lord; a martyr for the cause of Christ. As he sits in his solitary cell, there is one companion that cheers him — a Companion that is forever whispering to him, 'Let not your heart be troubled, neither be afraid.' 'Rejoice, and be exceeding glad — for great is your reward in Heaven!' That Companion is his Bible, his precious Bible. That brings peace and comfort to his soul.

Once more; go into some sick room, under a poor cottage roof. There will you find lying upon his bed, some poor worn-out sufferer. He has lain there perhaps for months. Sleep seldom closes his eyes. He scarcely knows what it is to be free from pain. His pale countenance speaks plainly of a fatal disease within. And yet he is calm, peaceful and resigned. And more than this — he is happy. And what makes him so? See him pull his well-worn Bible from beneath his pillow. And mark what a bright ray of hope beams upon his countenance, as he reads his morning Psalm, or traces the loving words of gospel truth. There Christ is made known to him — as the great deliverer from sin and sorrow.

Truly this brings 'joy and rejoicing to the heart.' Proud Pharisees may pass over the words of God with indifference, just as 'the full soul loathes a honeycomb;' but the humble child of God will ever thankfully exclaim, 'Your testimonies have I claimed as my heritage forever!' And why? 'They are the very joy of my heart!'

Let me then once more counsel you to take up your Bible as the food and drink of your soul. If you wish to get your faith strengthened, your heart warmed, your spiritual knowledge deepened; if you wish to stand firm on the rock, unshaken by the opinions of men; if you wish to be a bold, strong, earnest Christian — then live upon God's word; get acquainted with its blessed truths; feed upon

those green pastures which He has provided for His flock. Do not be content with getting a few Scripture phrases upon your lips — but get the spirit of Scripture into your heart. Get your soul leavened with its heavenly fragrance. This will bring you to know God, and make you 'wise unto salvation.'

One word more. Never take up the sacred volume without remembering that He, whose Book it is, must open its pages to your view. You cannot understand it — you cannot feel its power — unless God lifts up the veil from your heart. It will be to you 'as the words of a book that is sealed' — unless He unlocks it. Never do we need light and grace so much, as when we are reading God's Word. And never, I believe, is He so ready to bestow it. May the Lord enable you more and more to prize your Bible! May you be ready to say, 'I have found the Word of God to be precious to my soul. Once I cared more for the outside — than for its contents. Once it had a place on my table — but no place in my heart. Once I looked into it now and then as a matter of duty or to while away a half-hour. Now it is my constant companion, the food of my soul, the comfort, the delight, the joy and rejoicing of my heart!'

02.08. Preaching, a Saving Ordinance in the Christian Life

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How is it that the Word of God is read for weeks and months together, with so little profit? How is it that it is often preached with great ability, and with much earnestness — and yet it never gets beyond the outward ear of some who sit and listen to it? The truth is, there are many hearts which the Word of God has never yet effectually reached. A person may hear sermons with much attention; he may thoroughly understand what he hears, and store it up in his memory — but if God's Word goes no farther than this, it will not be a saving word to his soul. If the Holy Spirit does not apply it to his conscience, very little good will be done.

Now James, speaking of the Gospel, calls it, 'the engrafted word.' He uses this striking expression to show that it must not only be preached to us; it must not only be sounded in our ears; it must not only be listened to with gladness — but it must work its way into our hearts. 'Receive,' he says, 'the engrafted word.' 'Receive it,' as you would a friend who is welcome to your house. You would not bid him stand at the door without. You would let him in, and give him a choice place by your hearth. 'Receive it,' as you would some remedy which was able to save your life. Surely you would not place the bottle by your bedside, and merely gaze upon it. You would eagerly drink its contents, as that which was likely to cure you.

'The engrafted word!' What is the process with a graft? It is not enough to take the slip and fasten it on the tree; but we must cut it into the tree, or else it will take no effect. Just so must the Word of God enter it — it must get below the surface, and touch the very heart. Thus David says, 'The entrance of your words gives wisdom,' and again, 'Your word have I hid in mine heart.' And Paul thus exhorts us, 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly' — let it not only float in your imagination — but enter your heart, and lodge deep in your soul. But this expression seems to teach us something further. It teaches us that God's Word has a life-giving power — it must live within us. Should we be content to see the graft fixed ever so firmly in the tree? No, it must live and grow there, and produce a better and more abundant crop of fruit. And so too must it be with God's Word. It must be a living word within us. It must work a mighty change there. Its power must be felt within. Have you thus received the Word? You have heard it again and again. It may be, you have listened to it with deep attention. You have been struck by it. Perhaps the Preacher's words have made you thoughtful for the moment. You have gone home with deep searchings of heart. You have had a glimpse, as it were, of the world to come. You have been forced to look into your own heart. You have seen it to be very sinful, and you have felt your pressing need of a Savior. But have you received the Word? Have you heartily welcomed it to your soul? If it is indeed grafted by the Master's hand — then you will know it by this token — it will be fruitful; it will spring up.

It does indeed make one sad to think on how few hearts the Word of God takes real and saving effect! How many listen and listen — and yet come short of being converted! Some seed falls by the way-side — and it is soon snatched away. Some falls, as we imagine, into welcome ears — but it takes no root. And some too is quickly choked by the stifling business, and cares, and worry

of the world. Thank God it does sometimes light upon a better soil — and there it sinks in, and grows, and brings forth fruit unto eternal life.

Take heed HOW you hear. It is not a light matter to listen to a sermon. That sermon may be for the saving or the condemning of your soul. Every sermon you hear is for eternity. And just as the stroke of the blacksmith's hammer either makes the iron harder, or breaks it in pieces — so it is with the preached Gospel. Be sure, it never leaves anyone as it finds him. It either makes his heart tender — or it leaves him more hardened than before. It is either 'the savor of life unto life' — or the 'savor of death,' to his soul. But let us inquire how we should receive the Word. There is something that we must leave behind — and something that we must bring with us, to the hearing of God's Word.

We must leave behind our PRIDE. The man who comes to church with a proud, self-satisfied spirit is pretty sure to get no good for his soul. It is 'the hungry' whom God loves to fill with the good things of His Gospel; but 'the rich' (those who imagine that they have need of nothing) 'He sends empty away.' It has been well said that 'Only a broken heart can receive a crucified Christ!' The WORLD too must be left behind. How many think of the world, and the world only, all the six days of the week. Ay, and even on the Sabbath morning, the world still occupies their thoughts and hearts. When the hour of service comes, they hurry off to the House of God; and then they find themselves but little disposed for Prayer, and ill prepared to listen to the Word. And what wonder is it that it should be so? The world has been allowed to have full sway over them — is it to be expected then that they should be able in a moment to put it aside at their bidding? No, it still hovers around them. It clings to them, and they cannot shake it off. It creeps in as their companion in the very House of God! It stands by them, when they are upon their knees. It fills their minds, when they would be thinking of God. It blocks up the door of their hearts, lest the good seed should enter in. The minister of Christ speaks words of solemn consequence — but the heart is too full of earthly cares, and plans, and pleasures, to receive them. Like the inn at Bethlehem, there is no room there to welcome Christ. Yes, the world must be left behind, if we would profit by God's ordinance. And there is yet another thing, too, that must be laid aside — and that is, SIN. In the words, which I just now quoted, James speaks of 'laying apart all moral filth and evil,' and then, he says, 'Receive the engrafted word.' The heart must be cleared out and emptied — before God's truth can lodge within us.

Ah, here is the secret reason why so many are moved by sermons, and are yet unchanged by them; why so many are fully convinced, and yet remain unconverted. They feel persuaded that sin is ruining their souls, and that Christ alone can make them happy; that if they would only give their whole hearts to Him, they would feel a joy which they have hitherto missed. And yet they do not close with Christ. And why? Because they love their sins better! You will find perhaps hereafter that there was some sin — some little sin — some secret, hidden, heart sin — which you would not give up; and that that sin kept you from Christ, and hindered you from entering His blessed kingdom!

Oh, if your conscience whispers, 'Alas! so it is with me!' then I would affectionately urge you forthwith to part with that sin, whatever it may be, and however much it may cost you. Part with it, though it be dearer to you than a right hand or a right eye — or you must never hope to see God in glory. But there is not only something which must be laid aside — but also something that we must

bring with us to the hearing of God's truth. Here, again, we will take James's words. The apostle says, 'Receive with meekness the engrafted word.' A humble, meek, and teachable spirit is what we need. And this is the frame of mind that God will bless. God loves to teach the humble, child-like heart: 'The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek will he teach his way.' Pride nips the tender bud — and no fruit is brought to perfection. If we go to the house of God to pass judgment on the sermon we hear, and to set up our own wisdom against God's teaching — the I am sure that we shall hear in vain. But every true servant of God will come with a mind to obey. He only waits for a discovery of the truth, and then he will follow it. His language is like that of Job, 'What I see not — teach me.' He is ready to say with Cornelius, 'We are all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded by God.'

Whether you open your Bible at home, and sit down to read it, or whether you come to the house of God to listen to the preaching of it — be humble; for it is not man who speaks, but God. Remember your need of a heavenly Teacher. Put up a secret prayer to God, that He would clear away the mist from before you, and shine upon His own Word. Entreat the Holy Spirit to apply the truth to your heart, and to take of the things of Christ, and show them to you. Thus will those truths, which hitherto perhaps have been hidden from your soul — break in with new life, shedding peace and joy into your heart! But just consider, brethren, the wonderful power there is in God's Word. It is 'able to save the soul' — not merely to enlighten, to comfort, to quicken — but to save.

What! you may say, can God's Word save? Is not this too much to declare? When received into the heart, and engrafted there by the hand of God — it has saved, and it does save. We do not mean that it has power in itself to save a soul — but that it is an instrument which God uses for this purpose. It is the hammer by which He breaks the rock in pieces, and then puts it together in His own best way. Neither do we mean that the Word saves a man in a moment — at once. Salvation is a work that must not only be begun — but carried on, in the heart of a child of God. He is not saved by a single sermon. His attention may be powerfully aroused, and he may be led to seek salvation in earnest. He may be set forward on the road that leads to Heaven. But he needs continual grace and teaching, before he safely reaches his journey's end. But how does the Word do this? How does it save? It saves a man by first showing him that he is ruined by sin — that he is under the wrath of God, and that he cannot save himself. What a blessing when we have learned this lesson — when we stand stripped of our own righteousness, pleading guilty before God! Happy for us, if the Word of God has taught us this. It is one thing to acknowledge our guilt; but it is quite another thing to feel it — to feel sin as a burden weighing down our souls, that we long to get rid of!

Well, this is part of the teaching of God's Word, when applied to the heart by the Spirit. It convinces of sin. It brings us to a standstill. It leads us to cry out with all earnestness, 'I am a sinful man! O God, be merciful to me.' This is one stage of that blessed process by which the Word saves — it shows us our absolute need of a Savior.

But, thank God, we are not left there. This is only a part of the work, though a most important part; for, until the sick man is made conscious of his disease — he will care little for the physician. But the Gospel not only reveals to us our disease and our danger — but also our remedy. It says to the convinced and trembling sinner, 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' This is the glory of our message. This is the blessed errand on which we are sent to you — to tell

you of God's love — of Christ's atonement — that the door of Heaven stands open to you. We beg you, in Christ's stead, be reconciled to God.

Thus does the engrafted Word save. When it comes with quickening power to the soul . . .

it awakens men from their slumber;

it lays bare their hearts;

it shows them that they are undone;

it points to the cross;

it tells them of a Fountain in which they may wash and be clean;

and it tells them too of that indwelling Spirit, who can make them fit to dwell with God above.

How great are the triumphs of God's Word! What did it effect on the day of Pentecost? And what has it effected since? Has there never been a time in our own experience, when we have felt sad and down-hearted? We have looked for comfort — and found it not. We have gone to our Bible, with a secret prayer, that God would give His blessing — and then He Himself has shone upon its pages! The dark, heavy cloud has passed away — and some bright ray from His everlasting truth has beamed in upon us with its cheering light; so that we have got up gladdened and rejoicing. And is there not many a one who owes all his happiness to the simple preaching of God's truth? He was once careless and worldly — but he went to the Lord's house, and there his attention was arrested, and his conscience pricked. He heard, he listened, he believed. He became a new man in Christ! Are we going too far then when we speak of this as the great instrument in God's hands for saving souls? Oh, it is saving many, daily and hourly! May it save many more! May the words spoken from our pulpits never be spoken in vain! Shall we not, one and all, pray, and that earnestly — that God may be pleased to make His house a 'Bethesda,' 'a house of mercy,' to numbers who meet within its walls — a place where they may get light, and comfort, and peace to their souls — that God will pour out upon those who worship there 'the Spirit of grace and of supplications — and that He will give life and power to His own Word? Ask for this. Ask God to give to yourself and others what we so much need, the quickening, sanctifying, comforting influence of His grace.

02.09. Prayer, the Vital Breath of the Christian Life

09. Prayer, the Vital Breath of the Christian Life

What an important moment that is, when a living child comes into the world! How great is the anxiety with which a mother listens to the first breathing, or hears the first faint cry, of the new-born babe! That cry, which only disturbs and annoys others — is sweet to her ear!

Ah, there is a Parent who feels more for us than even a mother does for her little ones. A woman may forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the fruit of her womb — but God cannot lose His tenderness. He is love itself. The first breathing of new life in His children, the first cry which is sent up to Him from a heart in distress — fills Heaven with joy.

Now, Prayer is the breathing of a new-born soul. It is the first sign of life.

I am to speak in this chapter about Prayer, which I have called, 'the Breath of the Christian life.' Blessed subject! May God teach us what Prayer is, and quicken us in the exercise of it!

What is Prayer?

Ask the worldly-minded man. He will tell you what it is to him. It is something which he knows he ought to do; something which he has been brought up to do; something which his conscience will not let him leave altogether undone. But he has no pleasure in it. It is irksome to him. He is glad enough when it is over.

Ask the Pharisee — the Formalist. He seems to think that it is the mere utterance of words; the mere repeating certain holy sentences on his knees; the mere outward acknowledgment that God is the great Giver of all things. But we can go to better teachers than these.

Ask David what prayer is.

'As for me, I will call upon God!'

'I will cry unto God most high!'

'I cried with my whole heart!'

'As the deer pants after the water-brooks — so my soul pants after you, O God! My soul thirsts for God!'

Ask Jacob. He will tell you that it is a 'wrestling' with God.

Ask Daniel. It was something real with him. Not even the wrath of the king could close his lips. He prayed three times a day, though at the risk of his life.

Ask that penitent Prodigal, when from his wounded, aching heart those words came streaming forth, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and in your sight, and am no more worthy to be called your son.'

Ask the Publican, as he stands in the House of God, smiting his breast. Few words indeed he spoke; but they were earnest, burning words, which came forth from the very depths of his heart.

Ask the holy Savior. He spent whole nights in prayer; not because He was obliged to pray, but because He found comfort in prayer.

Once more, let us ask Jeremiah, who wrote the Book of Lamentations. He says in Lamentations 3:55, 'I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit. You heard my plea! Do not close your ears to my cry for relief. You came near when I called you, and you said: Do not fear!'

'Prayer,' observes a Christian writer, 'is human need, craving the Divine fullness; the wretchedness of earth, begging the consolations of Heaven; man's guilt, beseeching the mercy of God. By prayer the helplessness of the creature clings to the strength of the Creator. Prayer is a voice from Nature's wound, calling to the Heavenly Healer. All creation prays. The little plant droops its head, and curls its leaves; and thus asks for moisture. The sheep that has lost its lamb, fills the air with its piteous bleating. The dog howls when he is hungry; and he has been known to entreat you, almost with the power of speech, to follow him to the lonely spot, where his master lies wounded and bleeding.'

Every child of God prays. Where there is spiritual life — there must, and will, be prayer. As surely as a living man breathes — so surely will a living soul pray. We have many and great needs, especially spiritual needs — but it is only when we are brought under God's converting grace, that we begin to feel those needs.

Let me now give you some hints about your every-day prayers. I trust that many of you have a real wish to live a Christian life, and that you are ready to welcome any directions which we can give you.

First, then, as to the particular KIND of Prayer that we are now speaking about — Private Prayer. Other Prayer is also needful. It is very good for us to meet in the House of God for Public Worship. A peculiar blessing seems to be promised us when we do so. Christ pledges Himself to be in the midst of us. It is good for us too to assemble our families for prayer. But it is Private, Closet Prayer that I am now dwelling upon. And how needful this is! How necessary for us to get apart from our fellow-men, and draw near to our heavenly Friend in the silence of our chambers! I believe, if there was more of such prayer, and more earnestness in it — there would be more advance in the spiritual life, more growing up unto Christ in all things. When we call it 'Closet Prayer' — we are using our Lord's own words; for He says, 'And you, when you pray, enter into your closet.' Some of us have no difficulty here. We have our own quiet rooms, where we may go, and no one will disturb us. Be thankful for it. Enter into your closet. Let the walls of it witness to many a fervent prayer offered there. Remember, God is near, and never so near as when we are calling upon Him. Open your heart to Him. Tell Him of all your needs. Go to Him in all your trials. Let Him be your Friend — to whom you fly in every season; your Counselor — whom you love to consult; the Companion — with whom you delight to hold fellowship. But some have no private room where they can be alone — no door which they can close, so as to shut out all interruption. Some are so much mixed up with the busy world, that they are seldom at home. But still there is a way of feeling ourselves alone even in a crowd, even amidst the bustle of life. The noisy room, the crowded workshop, the open field, or the roadside — may be our closet. And God can and will hear us

there, if we call upon Him. We can lift up our hearts — without lifting up our voices. We need not be alone to do this. The silent breathing of the soul is sufficient.

Next, as to the MANNER of our prayers.

There must be EARNESTNESS. Jeremiah speaks of it as a cry — 'Hide not your ear at my cry.' When Esau had been cheated of his father's blessing, what earnestness there was in his complaint! We are told that 'when he heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father: Bless me, even me, O my father.' Such, too, was the cry of the Israelites, when their spirit was almost broken by the cruelty they met with in Egypt. 'They sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried — and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant.'

I have been present at death-beds, when the slumbering soul has at length woke up, and cried imploringly for mercy.

We have heard of shipwrecks too, and of the piercing cries that have been uttered, when those on board felt that death was near. I lately read of one who, while wandering along a lonely and rocky shore when the tide was down, slipped his foot into a narrow crevice. To his horror, he found he could not withdraw his imprisoned limb. There he sat, with his face to the approaching waves. He knew that, as the tide came in, it would rise upon him inch by inch, until it washed over his head. Did he cry for help? Yes, he did — and who could doubt his earnestness? He cried, but none heard him. He saw here and there a boat in the distance; but his signal did not attract their notice. How he must have envied the very sea-gull, as it skimmed the air above his head? And as he watched the waters rising inch by inch, his cries never ceased, until the last wave swelled up, and washed the dying shriek from his lips.

There was no help for him. There is for us. 'Call unto me, and I will answer you,' says our Lord. And why should any of us be less earnest than the man on the sea-shore was? Our past sins, and our present iniquities, press upon us — and we need pardon. Temptation assails us each day and each hour of our lives — and we need help. We are poor, and blind, and weak — and we need strength from God.

Then, do not look upon prayer as a thing which may be shuffled over in a few moments; as a duty which may be engaged in sleepily and carelessly — but let us look upon it as a thing into which we must put our whole hearts. Let it be a cry from our inmost souls.

There must also be REALITY in our prayers. Our prayers must be real. It is very easy to speak words which we do not feel. Our lips get into the way of uttering what our hearts deny. We often speak, for instance, very humbly of ourselves — when perhaps there is no humility within. We acknowledge before God that we are sinners — when all the while sin is not felt by us. We ask for grace — without having any desire for it. Be real. Be HONEST with God. Say nothing to Him which is not strictly true. And if you cannot feel in your heart what your head tells you that you ought to feel — then ask God that the feeling may be given you.

Again, pray OFTEN. Will once, twice, three times a day be enough? someone will perhaps ask. Yes, it will be enough, and too much, for us — if our souls are asleep. It will be too much, if our minds are engrossed with this world. We shall have no time for prayer. There are other things to

take up our thoughts. We are too busy for such a work as this. Ah, try and plead this with God; 'I am too busy.' Try and say it to Him, this night in your prayers; 'Lord, I have no time to seek You.' You dare not. Will you plead it in your dying hour, or at the judgment-day? Will you say, 'I had no time?' Rather say the truth — 'I had no heart for prayer; I lived to gain the world. I gained it — but I lost my soul.' Be often in prayer, O believer. Your Father hears you. He is ready to answer you. Be often in His presence. Your prayers may not be always expressed. There may be no utterance. Your petition may be sent up to Heaven, without any cry being heard. Remember that prayer is the breath of a soul. It may be but a gentle breathing, and yet God can hear it. Think of Jeremiah's words, 'Hide not your ear at my breathing.' A few words now about the DIFFICULTIES we find in our prayers.

Perhaps this has been a difficulty with you — If God orders everything, and has planned beforehand everything that happens — then what is the use of my praying? But surely if this stops the wheels of prayer, it ought also to stop the wheels of business. You might say, If God has ordained that I and my family should be well off in the world, it will be so — whether I provide for them or not. Or again, one might argue that if God has determined whether I shall live to old age or not, I shall reach that age which He has fixed upon — and therefore it matters not whether I am careful or not about my health or my safety. You will see then at once the folly of making God's decree a reason why we should not pray.

You may feel another difficulty. Do you not often find it very hard to get your hearts in tune for prayer? You know not how it is, but you seldom are in the right heart attitude for prayer. I will tell you how it is. You give yourself up to the world. You lose sight of Heaven perhaps all day. And therefore no wonder that you cannot, when the hour of prayer comes, bring your mind to seek God. You come to the throne of grace with your heart loaded with the plans, the toils, the difficulties, the disappointments, the irritations of the day. You come, dragging the world with you into God's presence. And the consequence is that you feel ready for anything else rather than prayer. It must be so, if the world is allowed to have full dominion over your heart.

Now if you suffer from this sad feeling — if this is indeed your unhappy experience — do not be tempted to think that it is better to give up prayer, when your heart is not in tune for it. Rather try and shake the world off — for if it hinders you in prayer, and it will certainly be in the way of your reaching Heaven. The Prophet complained of the Jews in his day, 'None stirs himself up to take hold on You!' We must arouse ourselves. We must stir up our drowsy hearts, and ask God to put us into a better frame.

Yes, and I will go farther, and say, If a man has so much worldly business on his hands, that it occupies all his thoughts, and calls away his mind from higher and holier things — then let him give up his business — let him part with his earthly cares — rather than forfeit Heaven! It is better to beg in the streets — than to die rich, and go to Hell.

There is another complaint, which even God's people sometimes make. They do not experience that enjoyment in prayer which they hear so many speak of.

If our hearts are not right with God, there can be no enjoyment in prayer. An impenitent man has no heart to pray. David once said, 'Your servant has found in his heart to pray this prayer unto you.' But an impenitent, worldly man has no such thing in his heart. He finds there no desire for

God. The work of prayer is unsuited to his taste. He may force himself into it for a time, but he cannot love it — it is impossible.

Hide not this truth from yourself — that the entire absence of joy in prayer is a sad but sure sign that you are a stranger to true religion. But I was rather speaking of those who are serving God, and yet complain that they do not find the joy they could wish in praying. How is this? Perhaps we are not living so near to God as we might five. There is a lack of close fellowship with Him. There is too wide a gap between Him and our souls. We have taken Him perhaps as our hope and our refuge — but not as the friend of our daily life. Surely, if we knew Him better, and walked more closely with Him — we would soon feel the real enjoyment of conversing with Him in prayer. Our moments of devotion would be our happiest moments. The hour of prayer would indeed be to us a blessed hour.

There are times, I dare say, when you feel warmth. Your heart glows within you, and God seems to be very near to you. And then you grow cold again, and the spirit of prayer flags within you. Now, did you ever try to keep up this warmth of feeling? Did you ever make a direct effort to do so? It may be done by meditation, by watchfulness, and by fixing the heart on God. When the fire burns in your soul — keep it alight. Don't let it go out. Beseech God to fan the flame, and to make you feel, not sometimes but always, in an earnest, believing, loving frame.

Lastly, who does not feel that his mind is sadly apt to wander in prayer? This is a great difficulty with any one who prays. But I am sure that if we were more watchful, this might in a great measure be got over. When you kneel down — think what you are going to do, whom you are going to address, and what you are going to ask. Remember that you are in the presence of the Great King, your Almighty Father; therefore, as Solomon says, 'Be not rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter anything before God.'

I have sometimes found it good to walk up and down my room, when engaged in prayer. I would not recommend this as a regular habit — but it may be desirable occasionally, and especially when our minds are disposed to wander.

After all, the very best of us pray but very poorly. But if we make a conscience of our prayers, and if we desire to render them what they should be — then God will strengthen us. The Holy Spirit will 'help our infirmities,' teaching us what to ask, and how to ask, and giving us such a praying frame as will make us feel that it is good for us to draw near to God. Be encouraged to pray more earnestly, more frequently, and with more reality. When you send a message by the telegraph, you expect it to reach its destination — you expect it to accomplish the purpose for which it is sent. Expect the same with your prayers. Lose this idea of reality — and your devotion will droop; your prayer will become a mere form. It has been said by an old writer, that 'Good prayers never come weeping home.' No, they are quite sure to bring down a blessing from Him, who is so ready to give, and has so much to bestow.

02.10. Public Worship, the Outburst of the Christian Life

10. Public Worship, the Outburst of the Christian Life The meeting together of God's people for Public Prayer seems to have been always observed. We can certainly trace it back as far as the time of the Israelites, over three thousand years ago. By the command of God, they used to meet together in a building set apart for His worship. This building was called the Tabernacle. It was a kind of moveable tent, just suited to the needs of the Israelites, during their journeyings from place to place in the wilderness. Here it was the delight of every pious Jew to meet his fellow-worshippers, and to draw near with them to the throne of grace. David, in his Psalms, often speaks of the great joy and comfort he felt in going up to the House of the Lord. He exclaims, in Psalms 84:1-12, 'How lovely are your tabernacles, O Lord Almighty! My soul longs, yes, even faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cries out for the living God!'

Soon after the days of David, the Temple was built at Jerusalem. This was a much more substantial building. It was something like one of our great Cathedrals, only much larger, and more magnificent. In this temple all the scattered Jews used to meet together at certain times in the year to offer up prayers and sacrifices. When our Lord came upon earth, the Temple was still standing. And besides, there were several other smaller places of worship called Synagogues, both at Jerusalem and in the other Jewish towns. In the Gospels we often read of Jesus and His followers being present in these Houses of Prayer. The very first thing that the Disciples did after their Lord's departure from them into Heaven, was to meet for Public Prayer. Such too was their constant custom afterwards. And we find Paul exhorting the Hebrews, 'not to forsake the assembling of themselves together.' So you see that Public Prayer is a scriptural duty. And can you not say that it has been to you a most delightful duty, a pleasure, a joy, a blessed privilege? Has not this again and again been the feeling of your heart, 'I was glad when they said unto me: Let us go into the House of the Lord!' Have you not sometimes gone to God's house with a heavy heart — and come away lightened? Have you not gone there, mourning over the coldness and dullness of your feelings — and come home warmed and comforted? The dew of God's grace has fallen upon your soul, and refreshed it. The Sun of Righteousness has risen upon you, and every cloud has been dispersed.

There is certainly a special blessing promised to us in Public Worship. Where a few are gathered together in the Savior's name, there He pledges Himself, as we have seen, to be in the midst of us — Matthew 18:20. Surely we can have but little faith, or we should look for a much larger flow of spiritual mercies in the House of God. But let me say a few words about the MANNER in which we should conduct ourselves in our public devotions.

First. Let me remind you that we meet in the house of God to pray. Remember, it is written, 'My house shall be called a House of Prayer.' But can it be necessary that I should remind you of this? Alas! it is necessary. Some go only to hear the sermon. Some go to stare about them. And others, like so many machines, go through the mere form of worship.

I was lately reading of a person who had been traveling among the Calmucs (a Russian tribe). At the entrance of some of their huts he observed a kind of small windmill. He inquired for what purpose they were put there; and he was told that they were 'praying-machines.' The owner of the hut causes certain prayers to be written by the priests; and they are then turned round by the wind, which saves him the trouble of repeating them himself. A Christian wonders at such absurdities. But in the conduct of these poor ignorant Calmucs — may he not see something like a picture of his own conduct? The devotions of too many Christians are but little better. It seems to be quite enough with some to make their appearance in God's house. They hold a Prayer-book in their hand — and this is to them what the praying-machine is to the Calmuc. They seem almost to expect it to pray for them, and to bring down from Heaven all the blessings they need, without any trouble or concern of their own. Before then you smile at the poor ignorant Calmuc's devotions — see that your own are what they ought to be. It is not enough to listen to the prayers, or to read them ever so attentively in your Prayer-book. You should pray the prayers. You should make them your own. Be not a mere listener in God's house, but a worshiper.

Secondly. Be careful about your posture. Ours is not, I know, a mere bodily service, but a spiritual one. It is the service of the heart. But still, a lowly posture of the body is fit for those who are approaching God.

If you will take the trouble to look out the following passages, you will clearly see that kneeling was the posture observed by the people of God in scripture times: Exodus 4:31; Exodus 34:8; Psalms 95:6; 1 Kings 8:54; Daniel 6:10; Luke 22:41; Acts 7:60; Acts 9:40; Acts 20:36; Acts 21:5. Standing however seems to have been allowable: Mark 11:25; Luke 8:11; Luke 8:13. But go into our churches, and what do you find? You see the greater part of the congregation, not kneeling, not even standing, but actually sitting at their ease, during the solemn act of prayer! Alas, how wrong! How useless to call ourselves 'miserable sinners,' and yet to approach God in such a way as this! Surely our people will never worship God inwardly, as long as they thus despise Him outwardly. Have you been hitherto one of the sitting part of the congregation? Then I solemnly and affectionately warn you not to dishonor God any more. Though many around you sit — you kneel, or at least stand. No matter, if you should act differently from the rest of those in your pew — you will be acting rightly. No matter if some should jeer you — your conscience will tell you that you are right. And sometimes, you know, we must meet with reproaches for our Master's sake. How happy it would make me, if I could watch you reading this book, and then follow you to church next Sunday, and see you on your knees before God! May He give you strength to do what is pleasing in His sight!

Thirdly. Join heartily in all the prayers. In some parts of the service only the voice of the minister ought to be heard. In these you should pray silently and secretly, but still you should pray fervently. But there are other parts in which all should pray aloud. And what a life and warmth it gives to our services, when this is heartily done. Supposing that all, with one heart and voice, should pray — when they are required to pray; praise — when they are required to praise; and sing — when they are required to sing; what would be the effect? What a change would then take place in our public worship! There would be no complaint then of the lack of heart and life, in our solemn services. Then, as Paul says, if there should come in 'one that believes not, or one unlearned,' he would indeed be 'convinced of all;' and, falling down on his face, he would worship God, and would report that God was truly among us.

Yes, this would be delightful indeed. And how can it be brought about? Not by empty wishes. Not by sighs after a better state of things. A congregation is composed of different members. You are one. Let your prayers, in the house of God, be henceforth more earnest. Let your voice of prayer and praise be heard in the congregation.

Fourthly. Keep your heart fixed on God. Have you not sometimes felt quite ashamed, when the service is ended, to think how little you have prayed; and how sadly your mind has wandered away from God? Have you not found that the most worldly, and the most trifling, thoughts will creep in — if they are not forcibly shut out? This shows what corrupt and fallen creatures we are. The world follows us to the very house of God. It clings to us, even when we are before His throne. Watch against this. Strive against it. Pray against it.

Lastly. Avoid all light, vain, and worldly conversation both in going to God's house, and in returning from it. If you go to church in a devout and prepared state of mind — you will find that this is the surest way to enjoy a peaceful and holy frame during the service. How often we have seen a person come in late and hurried! It is quite impossible that he can bring his mind to engage at once in the solemn work of prayer. Perhaps, for the last half-hour, he has been thinking of his dress, or has been engaged in some worldly matter; and thus he rushes into the presence of his God. No wonder if his heart is far away! No wonder if the world, instead of God, is in all his thoughts. It is very important then to try and get your heart right beforehand, by drawing near to God in your closet and asking Him to be specially with you in His House. And then, after the service, how is it usually with us? The congregation breaks up, and the doors open; and too many, as they walk home, begin almost immediately to talk about the most trifling matters. To hear them, one would little guess that they had been to the house of prayer. God is forgotten — heavenly things are put aside — and the good seed of His Word choked. Beware of this — for Satan thus draws off multitudes of souls. 'Keep your heart with all diligence!' May there be more praying people in our congregations! May God put more life into our services! May our confessions be more heartfelt, our petitions more earnest, our praises more lively, and our hearing more childlike! May we say of God's House, 'Surely the Lord is in this place. This is none other but the House of God, and this is the gate of Heaven!'

02.11. The Holy Spirit, the Seal of the Christian Life

11. The Holy Spirit, the Seal of the Christian Life The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the early followers of our Lord, was the great object to which He specially directed their thoughts. And in accordance with this promise, the Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost, in all the fullness of His power, to bless and give life to the Christian Church.

Now, it was promised by our Lord that the Holy Spirit should abide with us — not merely visit us for a time, but continue and remain with us. And He does now actually dwell in the hearts of all God's people. He is as truly present with them — as He was with the Disciples on the day of Pentecost. And if we cannot see this, and believe it — it is but a sad proof that we are still in our worldly state — not taught of God, and not under the influence of His grace! For does not the Savior Himself, when speaking of the Holy Spirit, say, 'Whom the world cannot receive, because it sees Him not, neither knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you, and shall be in you!'

I would ask those who deny the Spirit's influence, just to consider this —

Is it not most clearly told us in Scripture, that our Lord promised to bestow the gift of the Spirit upon His people?

Is it not clear that the Holy Spirit descended upon the Disciples ten days after our Lord's Ascension?

And again, is it not clear that, in the Acts and Epistles, Christians are spoken of as having the Holy Spirit in their hearts — nay, that if they are not led by the Spirit, they are not, and cannot be, the true children of God? But some have the notion in their minds, that the Holy Spirit is with the Church generally — but that He does not work in individual hearts. They do not, and cannot, deny His presence and His power in the church — but they will not allow that He carries on a special work in the Believer's soul. This they look upon as all imagination and enthusiasm. They are willing to pray in church, as we have been praying this morning, 'Almighty God, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love You.' But they would perhaps think it folly to kneel down alone in their own private chambers, and pour out their hearts to God, saying, 'O Lord, may Your Holy Spirit dwell within me; and fill me with His blessed self.'

Believe me, it is not enough to acknowledge that every true Church must have the Holy Spirit present with it, or it cannot be a living Church; but we must have the same Holy Spirit — each one of us. In fact, if you and I have not God's Holy Spirit working in our hearts, dwelling there at this moment — we are not real living Christians; there is something we lack, something without which we cannot be the true people of God. This is a solemn thought! Oh, that none of us may deceive ourselves! We may be regular church-goers, regular Bible-readers, regular at our private prayers, of upright and honest lives — and so far all is well. But if our hearts are not the temple, the abode, the dwelling place, of the Holy Spirit — if His presence and power are not felt deep in our souls — if He is not there, leavening our whole inner man — then we fall short of being genuine Christians; there is no life in us. This is too important a matter to be put aside with a mere passing thought. Let

us then seriously consider, what are the signs of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. I will mention four.

1. Earnestness as regards salvation. One would think that the salvation of a person's soul would be the first, the chief, the greatest concern with everyone. But is it so? We see this person eager about making money. We see another full of anxiety about his family. A third is very desirous to improve his health. But seldom, very seldom, do we find men filled with concern about their souls. We sometimes say, 'When a man gets older, he will become thoughtful.' But this by no means follows as a matter of course. How often we see people drawing near to the very brink of the grave, still careless and unconcerned. The world is leaving them — but they still love it, and cling to it, to the very last. Truly we need the Holy Spirit's quickening, awakening power to rouse us from our sleep, and make us seek salvation in real earnest.

2. The enlightening of the mind. Being naturally blind as regards heavenly things, we must be taught of God, and a light from above must shine in upon our souls, before we can even understand God's truth. If anyone wishes to see this plainly stated, let him quietly read over 1 Corinthians 2:1-16. We are there told, concerning 'the things which God has prepared for those who love Him,' that is, the good things which the Christian enjoys now that eye has not seen them, nor ear heard them. 'But' (the Apostle says), 'God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.' And a few verses on, he speaks still more plainly; 'The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them — because they are spiritually discerned.'

I will go even further, and observe that a person may know a great deal, and get hold of the outside of the Gospel — and yet, for lack of the Spirit's grace and teaching, his mind may be in darkness still. You may learn in childhood that God is love — and yet you may grow up utterly disregarding Him, and you may even die blaspheming Him! You may be acquainted with the holiest truths, and be able to speak learnedly about them — and yet you may be a wretched man. You may have this text upon your lips, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved' — and yet you may neglect His salvation all your days. But, when God teaches by His Holy Spirit — He teaches the heart — He enlightens the very soul.

3. Another sign of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will be love to God and to His people. The Spirit changes the heart of man, and raises it up from earth to Heaven. He not only teaches us that we ought to love God, but draws our hearts towards Him. 'The love of God' (as the Apostle says) 'is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given us.' And so it is with love to His people. The Holy Spirit not only shows us that it is our duty to love them; but He sows the seeds of love within us. Our hearts are drawn out towards our heavenly Father's children, 'By this we know that we have passed from death unto life — because we love the brethren.'

4. I will mention one more sign, and that a sure and unfailing sign, of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in a soul; and that is Holiness. Where the Holy Spirit is — there will be holiness; a love for holiness; a striving after holiness; a gradual growth in holiness; the bringing every thought, and desire, and feeling, into subjection to the will of God.

We may mistake nature, for grace. We may mistake the outside of religion, for that which is inward and real. But when we see a holy man — one walking with God, and doing everything to His glory

— this we cannot mistake — it is, and must be, God's own work in the soul.

Now, take these four signs, and examine your own heart. Are you earnestly concerned about your soul's salvation? Is your mind enlightened — do you see heavenly truths much more clearly than you once saw them? Do you love God your Savior and His people? And lastly, are you walking in the path of holiness?

Then, if so, do not doubt but that God's Holy Spirit has taken up His abode within you. But there is an expression to which I must in conclusion call your attention — the sealing of the Holy Spirit. In Ephesians 1:13, Paul says, 'After you believed, you were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise.' We find the same thing spoken of in two other passages of Scripture. In chapter 4:30, of the same Epistle, Paul says, 'Grieve not the Holy Spirit, whereby you are sealed unto the day of redemption.' And in 2 Corinthians 1:22, it is written, 'God has also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.'

What is this sealing? We must not look for it in the case of the unconverted, but in those who are true Believers; for the Apostle says, 'After you believed — you were sealed.' It is an after work, by which the Believer is confirmed and strengthened in his faith. Just as when any paper or document is drawn up, we are in the habit of signing our name at the end of it, and then we put our seal upon it, in order to show that we acknowledge it, and make it ours — so God by His Holy Spirit sets His stamp upon believers, and marks them for His own.

We often see God's people full of doubt and uncertainty whether they are accepted by God or not. Their hearts are turned heavenward — they love Christ, and wish to serve Him. But they do not feel happy. Their footing is not firm. There is a work of grace within them — but they seem to lack something. What is it? Not a voice from Heaven — to tell them that God is their Father; not a vision of the night — to remove all doubt. No, this is not God's way of dealing. What they need is a deeper work of the Spirit in their souls — they need this sealing, which is spoken of in Scripture. And often God is pleased to give this, under the preaching of the Word, or in reading of a chapter of the Bible. Some promise is brought by the power of the Holy Spirit, and sealed upon the heart. And thus the soul is led into the full assurance of understanding and of faith. The Believer feels that he is welcome, and that he is indeed one of God's adopted children. How blessed thus to have our way cleared, our doubts removed, our slavish fear calmed, and under the drawings of eternal love to approach God as a reconciled Father! No one who reads the New Testament can fail to see that this was the bright and happy feeling of true Believers in former days. And this it was that made them strong, and enabled them to go through the world as men who had 'made their calling and election sure.'

Look at Paul saying, 'But I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to those who should hereafter believe.' Did he not mean that all, who should believe like him, might rejoice as he rejoiced? He would not shut out one from that blessed source of joy to his own soul — the power of saying, 'But I have obtained mercy!'

Again, did not the early Christians speak in language of the greatest confidence, and say, 'We are of God.' 'We are fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God.' 'We were once darkness — but now are light in the Lord.' And may not we speak with the same holy, humble confidence? May not we take to ourselves the comfort that we are actually and really adopted into

God's family?

Yes, we may. And it is moreover the duty and the privilege of every Believer among us diligently and prayerfully to seek for this assurance of faith, this sealing of the Spirit. It is not an imaginary blessing — it is a real one, and it may be ours. Be not satisfied with a dim hope — or rest content with a past experience. Apply for a present pardon, a present sense of acceptance, a present salvation, a present Christ to rejoice in, and to live upon.

02.12. The Christian Life, a Daily Progress

12. The Christian Life, a Daily Progress In Ephesians 4:1-32, the Apostle speaks of the Christian Church. In Ephesians 4:4-6, he describes its oneness; 'There is one body and one spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.' In the following verses he shows how abundantly Christ has provided for the growth and strength of His Church, 'Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he says, he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.' And all this that our spiritual growth might be as sure and gradual as the growth of our bodies, 'For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; until we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man (or a full-grown man), unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.'

If you watch a child, you will see how from year to year his stature gradually increases, until he attains to the perfection of a full-grown man. But if he remains stationary — if year after year his limbs gather no strength — if there is no growth — then the conclusion you come to is that something is wrong. There is clearly something lacking, or something which interferes with the usual course of nature. So is it with the Christian. When there is no advance, no growth in grace, no spiritual progress — then something must be wrong. It is not God's will that it should be so. He would not have us always to be mere babes in Christ, always children; but He desires to see us increasing in our spiritual stature, and advancing to spiritual manhood.

Now, it is against this stuntedness in the Christian growth that the Apostle goes on to warn us, when he says, 'that we henceforth be no more children.' The expression 'children' or babes, is sometimes used in a good sense, and sometimes in a bad sense. Truly it is a blessed thing to be a child of God; to be taken out of the family of the world, and to be brought into God's family; to have a place among His sons and daughters; to be, as it were, even a little one in His household. And yet it is well to remember that we must not be always children. I am sorry to say, there are some in the Christian Church, whom we believe to be God's people — but they never seem to be growing and maturing. There is no running of the Christian race — but rather a standing still. Instead of moving forward, it seems as much as they can do to keep their ground. They have the same doubts, the same difficulties, the same weakness of faith, the same infirmities of temper, the same feebleness in grappling with temptation — that they had years ago. Their wings are clipped; they do not fly upwards; their souls 'cleave unto the dust.' And what is the reason of this? God is willing to give. Christ offers a full supply. There is no lack in Him — the lack is in ourselves. 'We have not — because we ask not.' If you feel that this is alas! the case with you — then why should it be so a moment longer? Go to Christ with the cry of the needy. Take your empty pitcher to the full Fountain. And then you shall no more have reason to complain, 'My leanness! my leanness!' But this state of spiritual childishness is further described by the apostle in the chapter to which I have referred: 'Tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men,

and cunning craftiness, whereby they lay in wait to deceive.' The weak Christian is here compared to a tender reed shaken by the wind; or to a ship at sea, tossed about by the waves, or driven forward by the gale; or to a thin fleecy cloud sweeping across the sky on some stormy day. Just so is it with the weak and unstable Christian. There is no firmness and fixedness about him. He is swayed this way and that way, by the first one who tries to persuade him. He is easily led away by the craft and cunning of those who are always ready to draw aside the wavering. In Paul's days, when there were many false teachers — how needful it was for Christians to be firmly established in the truth; to be resting on the one great foundation. And is this less needful now? As soon as anyone becomes a real Christian, is he not assailed by enemies on every side — enemies within and without — secret enemies and open enemies? And many a person, who did once run well, has been drawn aside from the right path, and like a vessel without a rudder — has been driven upon rocks, and has made shipwreck of his faith.

How necessary then that, in our weakness, we should have some strong, solid support on which we may lean. We have a Rock, even Christ; and if we cleave to Him, we shall, and must, be eternally safe. The Apostle points to Him, when he says, that 'we may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ.'

I have explained to you this passage at some length. Let me now call your attention to the great lesson which it teaches us; namely, that the work of grace is a Gradual work. The Christian begins by being a babe in Christ. There is a childhood in religion. When a soul is quickened and born again of God, everything seems new to it. We are 'new creatures — old things are passed away — behold, all things are become new.' Prayer is a new thing — real, earnest, heart-prayer. The Bible is a new book to us — we see it to be the Word of God — we feel it to be the nourishment of our souls. The House of God is a new place to us. The Sabbath is a new day to us. Once it was a weariness — now it is our delight. Oh, the joy, the new, fresh joy, that is felt by one who has just 'passed from death unto life;' who has burst the bonds of sin, and has tasted the glorious liberty with which Christ makes His children free! But the young Christian is weak. There is much ignorance and darkness yet about him. He is liable to be misled. His footsteps are apt to slip. He has many lessons yet to learn, and many a battle yet to fight. After a little while, doubts and fears spring up; and these too are new to him, for he never felt them before. He discovers too that his faith is very weak — and this again is something quite new to him; for time was when he never thought about it, or cared about it. And most surely will Satan attack him upon his weakest points. Young Christians, again, are often rash, often headstrong, often harsh in their judgments of others.

Now we must expect to find such infirmities in those who have newly entered upon their Christian course. And those who are more advanced ought to take them by the hand, and help them in their weakness. Yes, those very Ephesians, to whom Paul was writing, were once but 'children' in the spiritual life. But the Apostle warns them not to continue in this state — 'that we henceforth be no more children,' but that we 'may grow up into Him in all things, who is the head, even Christ.' And again he speaks of our growing up into 'a perfect man,' and arriving at a full Christian stature. This shows us then that we should be growing Christians. Our course should be onward; and our path should be like that of the Sun, 'shining more and more unto the perfect day.' One stone after another should be added to the Christian Building — and so we should be built up a spiritual house;' and being 'fitly framed together,' should 'grow into a holy temple.' It should be with our souls, as it is with our bodies — we should wax stronger and stronger, and every limb should do its

appointed work. This is important. May God enable us to lay it to heart! For remember, if we are true Christians — we shall be growing Christians.

1. We should grow in KNOWLEDGE. Knowledge, if it is not accompanied with grace, is worth but little. The Apostle tells us that mere 'knowledge puffs up.' But it is heavenly knowledge that we should earnestly seek after. To know ourselves; to know God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent; to know the truths of the Gospel — all this is within our reach, for God has revealed it to us in His Word. And the Christian, who studies his Bible with prayer, will become more and more enlightened. He will 'grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

We must not only desire to be Christians, but to be wise Christians, intelligent Christians, enlightened Christians. Pray for the blessed teaching of the Spirit. Ask Him to 'lead you into all truth.' Get acquainted with your Bible. Get to know something about the Church to which you belong. Get to understand her doctrines, and see how thoroughly they agree with the Word of God. If you are a Churchman, be an earnest, hearty, intelligent Churchman. Love your Church, and 'be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you — with meekness and fear.'

2. We should grow in FAITH too. The more we know of Christ, and the more we experience His love and the greatness of His salvation — the more simply we should trust Him, and the firmer should be our confidence in Him. We should be ever praying, 'Lord, increase our faith!' We should desire that Christ 'may dwell in our hearts by faith;' and that we 'may grow up into Him in all things.' We should try and leave the land of doubts and fears — and soar upwards in the full enjoyment of God's presence. The Believer's faith should rest upon a rock, so that nothing can shake it.

3. We should grow in LOVE. Paul says to the Philippians, 'This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more.' And so the Thessalonians, 'The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another.' Our love to Christ should be a growing love — and the more of it we possess, the more we shall love His people for His sake.

If this flame of holy love has been kindled in our once cold hearts — is it, I ask, burning brighter, and steadier, and stronger? Do we love our Lord, not merely when our affections are warmed by excitement, but with that constancy and evenness which belongs to His true friends? And do we love our Brethren more and more, desiring to do them good both in their souls and bodies, and rejoicing in their welfare?

4. We must grow in HUMILITY. Ah, there is no surer test of grace than this — are we growing humbler? Is self put down — and Christ exalted in its place? The young Christian is oftentimes a little arrogant — but the more we know of ourselves and of our Lord, the more lowly will our walk be. The fuller and riper the fruit — the lower do the boughs droop. The grain falls to the ground, while the dust that is mixed with it flies aloft before the wind. We often meet in these days with bold Christians, earnest Christians, active Christians. But how rare to meet with a really humble Christian! There are such to be found — but alas, how few! It needed much grace to make Paul say, 'I am less than the least of all saints!' 'God forbid that I should glory save in the cross!'

5. We should grow in ZEAL and ACTIVITY. It is well to be doing something for Christ and His Church. If we would have our bodily limbs increase in vigor — we must exercise them, we must

give them work to do — or else they will very soon grow feeble and powerless. And so with our spiritual frame. It is good for our soul's health to work for God. Nothing helps the Christian, and makes him grow, so much as engaging in some active work in the cause of Christ. While he is doing good to others, a blessing is sure to come into his own soul.

6. We should grow in HOLINESS and LIKENESS to Christ. The sanctifying work of the Spirit is a gradual work. It is often long before we discover our sins and, when discovered, it is no easy matter to part with them. But if God is really at work in our souls — there will be an increasing hatred of sin, and an increasing desire after holiness. That person has made but little progress on the way to Heaven — who has not learned to curb his evil nature, and whose life does not show forth the power and grace of the Gospel.

7. Once more, we must grow in FITNESS FOR HEAVEN. It is with the true Believer, as it is with the ripening fruit. Though hard at first, its substance grows soft. Though sour and green at first, it becomes rich and mellow. Though it once was fixed tightly to the tree, when it grows ripe it is ready to drop at the slightest touch. And so is it with the Christian who is growing in grace and ripening for Heaven. His heart becomes mellow, and soft, and tender. He is loosed from earth and earthly things. He yields himself readily to the hand of death, and leaves the world without a wrench. On the other hand, there is some fruit which hangs upon the tree, and never ripens. The showers of Heaven descend upon it, the rays of the sun light upon it — but it never ripens. And are there not some, who bear the name of Christ, who are planted as it were in the garden of the Lord, who bask in the very sunshine of His favor, who have every advantage they can need — and yet they never ripen for Heaven; they are never ready to die; they will never be fitted for the Master's presence?

Look upon this life as a ripening time for eternity. Lose no opportunity of getting ready for the great change. Sit loose to this world, and live for eternity. Let your 'life be hid with Christ in God;' and then, 'when Christ who is our life shall appear, you shall appear with Him in glory!'

Seek to be a growing Christian. Pray that you may grow . . .

in knowledge,

in faith, in love,

in humility,

in zeal and activity,

in holiness and likeness to Christ,

in fitness for Heaven.

Happy is that Church, and that heart, in which this growth is going on! I often think that God has wonderfully blessed our Church in the last few years, and is wonderfully blessing it still. I sometimes feel so — but I long for more decided proof of it. And oh! that each one of us may be able to say, 'He is indeed blessing me. I feel that I am not as I once was. Those things which once were gain to me, I have counted loss for Christ. Yes, doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. For Him I desire to live — for Him I am

ready to die — with Him I hope to dwell throughout eternity!

02.13. The Christian Life, a Daily Struggle

13. The Christian Life, a Daily Struggle

There are many struggles going on in the world around us. There are nations groaning under oppression, and struggling for liberty. There are countries at War with one another, each struggling for the mastery. There is many a man, who has been unjustly accused, struggling to prove his innocence. There are people too, who have been brought low by misfortune, struggling against poverty, and trying hard to raise themselves in the world. All these struggles are going on at this moment. But there is another struggle, which no one ever yet earnestly engaged in without success. The Bible speaks of it, and calls it 'our warfare' that is, the warfare which God's people are engaged in. Let us see, I. What is the nature of this warfare.

II. What are the weapons which we are to use.

III. What is the object to be gained.

I. What is the NATURE of this warfare? It is a spiritual struggle. 'We do not war,' says the Apostle, 'after the flesh for, as he says in another place, 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.' It is a conflict with Satan — and with our own evil nature.

There are in the world two great powers: the power of evil — and the power of good; the kingdom of God — and the kingdom of Satan. These are set one against the other. Satan is ever trying to advance his kingdom, and to get the upper hand. He struck his first blow, when he drew away our first parents from their allegiance to God — and he has tried ever since to mar the Lord's work. And never did he try so hard, as when Jesus appeared in the world on His great errand of redeeming love. He then dared even to tempt the Son of God Himself, and endeavored to thwart His glorious work. And so now, wherever the gospel seed is sown, he is ready to pluck it up, or else to scatter tares among the wheat.

Here then is a great spiritual conflict going on in the world — a conflict . . .

between the Lord's people and the servants of Satan,

between light and darkness,

between sin and holiness. But this is not exactly the conflict of which I am going to speak. There is still another — namely, that inward struggle, which goes on in a person's own heart; not in every heart, but in the hearts of all God's people. It is an inward and spiritual conflict, which none can feel but those who are under the influence of God's grace. And this is the reason why I have called the spiritual life a daily struggle. When a soul is first awakened, opposition is sure to spring up:

opposition from the world — which is unwilling to part with one of its followers;

opposition from Satan, who before like 'a strong man armed,' had peaceful possession of the soul, and will not now without a desperate effort unloose his grasp;

and opposition too nearer home, in our own heart.

Ah, once there was all ease and quietness within; there was no disturbance, no anxiety, no concern, no questioning of ourselves. And why? Because the soul was dead. But the moment grace began to work, then the struggle was felt. Hear how it was with Paul. He tells us how severe the warfare was in his case — what a conflict there was between his new and spiritual nature, and his old evil nature which still remained within him: 'I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do — this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God — through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin!' Romans 7:18-25

Here was a violent conflict continually carried on in Paul's soul between the old man and the new man, between the flesh — and the spirit, between the bad part of his character — and the better part. And this it was that led him to say to the Galatians, 'The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. These are contrary the one to the other — so that you cannot do the things that you would.' Is it any wonder then that Christ's people are sometimes sad? Are we surprised that now and then they seem so anxious? It is because there is this great struggle going on in their souls. They earnestly desire to do right — but there is something within which hinders them — something continually pulling them back, when they wish to go forward. But it may be asked: Is this warfare always going on? Is this struggle a continual one? There are times, when the Christian is especially tried. There are periods in his experience, when the enemy assails him with unusual fierceness, when he has to gather up all his strength to oppose him; when he is forced to summon all his faith, and to apply earnestly to God for His promised aid. But besides these special occasions when the struggle is severe, there is a lesser warfare always going on in the Believer's soul. There is a daily struggle — a struggle which lasts all the while we are in this wilderness world, and never ceases until we reach the heavenly Canaan.

Perhaps I am speaking to one who knows and feels that this is the case. Can we ever say that our warfare is accomplished, our journey ended, our race run — as long as we remain here in this poor world? No, there is always an enemy near, some danger to be guarded against, some evil to be overcome — some fresh gift to be sought. 'Not as though I had already attained,' says the Apostle, 'either were already perfect — but I follow after.' It is a daily 'pressing towards the mark.'

Such is the great warfare which the Word of God speaks of — a spiritual warfare — a warfare within the soul — a warfare that is always going on, so long at least as there is infirmity, temptation, and sin, to be resisted — in short, so long as life lasts.

Let us now inquire,

II. What are the WEAPONS with which we fight? We are told that, 'The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God.' They are not such as men of the world use, but what God has provided. When the followers of the false prophet Mahomet began to spread their religion, they did it by violence — that was a 'carnal' weapon. When Peter wished to defend his Master, he drew his sword — that again was a 'carnal' weapon. How different were the weapons which that same Peter and his brother apostles used a few years after, when they won souls to Christ. Look at 2 Corinthians 6:1-18, and see by what means they gained their victories: 'By pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by love sincere, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness.' These were their weapons — and they were 'mighty through God.' And these too are the weapons by which hard hearts are broken, and souls won, in these days also. But I am not speaking now of the work which the minister of Christ is carrying on — but of that work of grace which is going on in the heart of every true Christian. How does he fight the good fight of faith? Is there a prize to be won — and he must strive for it as best he can? Is there a warfare to be waged — and he has no weapons but those with which nature provides him? We might well pity him, if this were the case.

Just suppose a person awakened to the importance of religion, earnestly desiring to serve God, and to reach Heaven — but yet left entirely to his own resources. He feels his faith to be weak — and how can he strengthen it? He has powerful enemies — how can he stand up against them? He has a sinful, treacherous heart — how can he subdue and sanctify it? If left to himself, he would indeed soon fail — and the little spark of religion would soon die within him.

But, thank God, He does not leave His people alone and unprovided for. He has bid us to seek His help in prayer, and lean upon His grace. He has given us an armor, in which we may subdue every foe, and be 'more than conquerors.'

Here is our great comfort; 'The Lord Almighty is with us — the God of Jacob is our refuge!' Our dangers and our trials are great — but not greater than we can bear. When any one is earnestly engaged in fighting the good fight, God's eye is upon that person — He stands ready to give him the wished-for support, and to help him according to his need.

Sometimes we feel almost disheartened with the toils and difficulties which are before us. Sometimes the way seems very rugged — and the hill very steep. Sometimes our trials seem too great for flesh and blood. Yes, and they would be too great, if we had only flesh and blood to meet them. But there is a Heavenly Helper — and with His assistance we can master them all. We 'can do all things through Christ who strengthens us.' Oh, then, why should we ever be cast down? As weak as our own powers are — they will be 'mighty through God.' As puny as we are in ourselves — we shall be as giants, if like David we go forth in the name of the Lord. But there is yet another inquiry to make.

III. What is to be GAINED by this warfare? What is the Christian's great object, for which he struggles so hard? It is 'the pulling down of strongholds, the casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God;' the 'bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.'

Here is a glorious work indeed to be accomplished. Here is something to be demolished; something to be kept under control; something to be won for Christ. Let me say a word upon each.

There is something to be demolished. There are 'strongholds' to be 'pulled down.' Just as in battle there are certain strong fortresses which must be completely destroyed, and leveled with the ground, or there will be no hope of victory — so it is in the Christian warfare. For instance, the love of the world, which naturally has possession of our hearts, is one of these strongholds. That must be pulled down, to make way for the love of Christ. Pride is another stronghold, which sets itself up in every unconverted heart. That too must be lowered, as it is written, 'The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted.' In short, every sin which still strives for the mastery in the heart that is changed by grace — every such sin must be fought against, and subdued, and destroyed.

Ah, it may be a hard and a long warfare — but if we fight manfully, and in dependence upon God, we shall succeed at last. For the promise is, 'Sin shall not have dominion over you.' God 'shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.'

Then, there is something to be kept under control — 'casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts against the knowledge of God.' I am sure, if we know anything of our own hearts, we shall feel that there is a great deal that needs constant curbing there. Our vain thoughts, our vile affections, our unbelief, which are always rising up, and troubling us; our ignorance, which sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and leads us away from His truth — all these need to be kept under control. And how can we do this, unless we are ever on our watch, and ever seeking fresh and fresh grace from God? If we attempt it with our fleshly weapons — we shall fail. But if we use the grace which God so freely gives — then the victory will be ours.

Once more — there is something to be won to Christ, 'bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.' He claims all our thoughts, and all our hearts — and it is our happiness to give them to Him. But it is no easy matter. And yet it may be done. Our weapons are powerful enough to effect it. Let us only strive and pray — strive as those who are really in earnest, and pray as those who feel that prayer is their strength — and we shall find that one thought after another, and one desire after another, will by degrees be subdued, and brought as a prisoner to Christ.

Happy those who are thus winning spiritual victories — who are learning to control their tempers, their wills, their desires — and are gradually bringing every feeling of the heart into sweet submission to their Lord! And now I will close this subject with two short directions. The first is, Learn to look on the Christian life as a Daily struggle. Do not expect it to be all smooth and easy. Be prepared for many a conflict. Enter heartily upon this warfare.

How is it as regards earthly things? Who are those who succeed in the world — who win, who gain the prize? The Strong Man, who gives himself vigorously to his work; the Student, who reads and studies that he may outstrip his fellows; the dauntless Sailor, who defies the storm, at the risk of his life runs up the rigging to obey his Captain's orders; the Soldier, who at the sound of the bugle rushes from the trenches, springs into the deadly breach, and fights his way on and on, until his flag waves in victory above the smoke of battle!

Just so, it is the Christian who is earnest in faith, and strong in prayer, who wins the battle of the Lord. 'The kingdom of Heaven suffers violence — and the violent take it by force.' My other direction is this, Whatever special work you engage in, remember that you need a strength better

than your own — and that strength will be granted, if only you apply for it. Are you anxious to do some good to others, to win a brother's soul, or to comfort a mourner's heart? Do you want . . .

to overcome some of your own evil habits,

to destroy some sin, or

to obtain some Christian grace?

Never set about it as if you had power of your own to accomplish the work. This would be making the weapons of your warfare carnal. But rather throw yourself simply on God, and ask Him to work with you, and in you, by His Almighty power.

Such are the directions that I would give you. And may God enable you to act upon them, and thus to do greater things than you have ever yet done in His name!

02.14. The Christian Life, a Life of Joy

14. The Christian Life, a Life of Joy

We all know what joy is; and we have all tasted it in some shape or other. Who is there that cannot call to mind some event in his past life, when he was for a time unusually happy, and his heart was filled with joy? But observe, this may be, without there being a spark of religion in our souls. For this joy is a mere natural joy — mere earthly joy — it is quite different from that higher joy which is so often spoken of in Scripture.

I have sometimes heard people say, that there is no joy but in religion. If they mean there is no true joy, no lasting joy — then I agree with them. But if they mean that the unconverted man can never feel happy, I think that they are mistaken. For there is a joy which the world gives, and which perhaps you and I have often felt — and it is folly to deny it. Why, David draws a picture of earthly happiness, even in the case of an ungodly man, when he describes him as 'prospering in the world,' and 'spreading himself like a green bay tree.'

I think that it will be useful to us, and interesting also, first to trace some of the peculiar features which mark the Christian's joy, and then show its difference from worldly joy.

1. Spiritual joy comes directly from God. He alone can give it. The happiness of worldly people comes from what is around them. If their circumstances in life are prosperous — then they are happy. If they enjoy health, and freedom from pain and anxiety; if they meet with no opposition or unkindness; if all goes smoothly — then they are happy, it may be. But the Christian's happiness is not bound up in these things. It is not accidental happiness. It does not depend on circumstances. But it comes straight from God. It is His blessed gift to His own people. It is spoken of as 'the joy of the Lord.' Christ calls it His joy — His peace. This was His farewell legacy to His people, 'Peace I leave with you — My peace I give unto you;' and, again, 'These things have I spoken unto you that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full.' And yet we are almost surprised to hear Christ speaking of His joy. For was He not 'a man of sorrows?' Was not His life one of toil and tears? Where then is the joy of which He speaks, and which He prays that we may have as our portion? Are burdens, insults, sorrows, persecutions, crucifixions — joys?

Truly He was 'acquainted with grief' as regards His outward condition. But there was within a deep well of love and joy which never failed. He delighted in His suffering errand. It is true, He was often grieved at the hardness of men's heart. It is true, He was sometimes hungry, and thirsty, and weary — but He had 'food to eat,' which men knew nothing of. And so it is with His people. He calls upon them to cut off right hands, and pluck out right eyes, and deny and crucify themselves, and be poor in spirit, and bear the cross after Him. And what joy, it may be asked, is there in this? How can the Christian Life be called a life of joy? Ah, but there is such a thing as 'dying — and behold we live; as chastened — and not killed; as sorrowful — yet always rejoicing; as having nothing — and yet possessing all things.' The Christian can look up, and thank God that there is in his soul a fountain of peace, of which God Himself is the spring. It comes from Him. He is the

Author and Giver of it.

2. Spiritual joy has God for its object. Not only is He the bestower of it — but He is the great object of the Believer's delight.

We are disposed to look here, and there, and everywhere for happiness. Like the restless bee — we try one flower after another. But never can we say of any earthly thing, 'Here will I dwell. Here I find that which satisfies me.'

Very different is it with the Christian. He too, perhaps, has made many a fruitless search — but he has found peace at last. He has found it in Christ. He rests his weary soul in the Savior's bosom, and he is happy. He feels, 'They may take away my worldly goods. My friends may forsake me. They may persecute me, bear false witness against me, take away my character. But they cannot rob me of my blessed hope — they cannot part me from my Savior!'

If then you ever feel uncomfortable and restless, do not imagine that you would be better anywhere else than where you are, or better under any other circumstances. Do not pitch upon this or that object, and imagine that if you had it — that it would bring you happiness. Do not say, 'Who will show me any good?' But rather say, 'Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon me.' Look upwards to Him, from whom alone real peace comes, that so among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, your heart may surely there be fixed, where true joys are to be found.

It may happen sometimes that you open your Bible, and get little or no good. You may turn to religious friends, but there is no comfort there. You may even come to God's house, and find it but a barren wilderness. But go to God Himself. Go to the Savior. Rest your soul upon Him — and you are sure to find peace. 'I will go,' said the Psalmist, 'unto the altar of God, unto God, my exceeding joy!' Christ is 'our peace.' 'The Lord is my portion, says my soul.'

3. This spiritual joy LASTS. Can this be said of earthly joy? No, we may have it today — but we cannot reckon upon it tomorrow. It is like the sun, which often disappears as soon as we begin to bask in its warmth. Our mind is bent on it for weeks and months. At last we obtain it, and our heart is content. But how long does it remain? Perhaps it is soon taken away again. Or, if it remains, we discover that it does not give us the pleasure we expected. And then we turn to something else, in the hope of finding enjoyment in it. But the joy we are now speaking of, when once it enters the soul, remains there. We can reckon upon it as our own. Yes, once gain this prize, and it becomes yours. It may for a time be damped, and smothered in the soul — but there it is, planted there by the hand of God Himself. Satan may disturb it now and then. Sometimes it is so weak within us, that it is hardly felt. But nothing can steal it away from that heart which God has blessed. 'Your joy, no man takes from you!'

4. It is unselfish.

Worldly joy, on the other hand, too often has self for its center. What flatters, and pleases, and exalts self — is what alone rejoices the worldly heart. But the Christian's joy has its center in God. He finds delight in God's service. He rejoices when God is honored. And he takes pleasure, too, in the welfare and happiness of others. The Savior seems to have found His chief joy in doing good, in relieving the sick, in comforting the mourner, and in saving souls. And we are told that a thrill of delight is felt by the very host of Heaven, when a lost sheep is received, and brought home to the

fold. Such, too, is the Christian's joy. It is unselfish. To see his Father honored — to see his fellow-men saved and happy — this brings the purest joy to his soul.

5. A fifth feature in this joy is that it depends but little on outward things.

Think of those who lived in the days of the Apostles. There was everything in their case to cast them down. All outward things were against them. But there was that within them which enabled them to rejoice in their tribulation. Instead of being filled with alarm and sadness, they were 'filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.' So it was in all their persecutions — they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Savior's name.

See how they bore their troubles at Philippi. What do we hear under those prison walls? Is it the dismal sound of moaning and distress? No, we hear amid the clank of chains — the voice of joy and gladness, the song of thankfulness and praise.

Again, it is said of others, that 'they took joyfully the confiscation of their goods, knowing in themselves that they had in Heaven a better and an enduring substance.'

Think of the Martyrs, too, who in later times suffered so nobly, so patiently, so cheerfully, for Christ's sake. They welcomed the very flames that took away their lives. How was this? Were they not filled with a joy from Heaven, which man could not take from them? And I would ask you if you know what Christian joy is? When have you felt happiest? When have you drunk deepest of this heavenly joy? Not perhaps when prosperity has shone full upon you — but in some hour of trial, when the world was nothing to you, but God was everything. Then you felt the Savior near you; you saw religion to be a real thing; your heart leaped with joy; you experienced a happiness which you cannot describe.

6. This joy is often most felt in the hour of death.

How remarkable! For then it is that our earthly joys utterly fail us. When the worldling is forced to part with his friends, and his possessions — when life is ebbing fast — what is left for him? Alas! nothing. Oh, what a gloomy prospect! No wonder that such people should look upon Death as 'the king of terrors,' and should shrink from the very thought of it. But how is it with one who knows and loves Christ? There is a peace and joy in his soul, which neither sickness, nor pain, nor even death, can weaken. He is happy — for he 'knows whom he has believed.' He feels that he is near his home, that he is soon going to 'enter into the joy of his Lord.'

If we could have stood by Peter, or Paul, or Stephen, or 'the disciple whom Jesus loved,' in their dying hour, I suppose we would have found them happy, very happy . . .

in the love of Christ,

in the comfort of the Holy Spirit,

and in the hope of Heaven. But are true Christians, then, always happy in a dying hour? No, I think not — not always. They have enough to make them happy. They have the spring of joy within them — but the waters do not always flow. The brightest Christian is not without his trials; and sometimes his bitterest trials, his darkest days, come at the close. Sometimes — we know not why — but sometimes the Christian's evening is stormy and overcast. It seems as if the Savior were no

longer near him. The peace he once felt is gone, when he most desires to have it. But has the Savior left His servant? Is his joy forfeited? Oh, no! That loving Friend is by his side, though he knows it not, and is ready to fill his soul with a full flood of joy, if not now, at all events when it takes its happy flight from this earthly prison.

Let our prayer be that the close of our life may be peaceful and joyous. But if God should, for some wise reason, deny us this — still let us remember that 'light is sown for the righteous,' and that, although 'weeping may endure for a night' — joy is sure to 'come in the morning.'

We have seen then that this joy is the Christian's portion. It belongs to us, if we are God's people. I do not say that we shall always have it. I do not say that one Christian partakes of it as richly as another. No, a hundred things may hinder the feeling of joy in our hearts. But seek for it. Pray that it may be yours. The Christian Life ought to be a happy life. And if it is not so with us, then most likely there is something wrong. It ought, I say, to be a most happy life — for what are the stages in it?

There is the joy of Conversion — the happy feeling of being brought near to God.

There is the joy of Forgiveness — thus we pray, 'Grant, merciful Lord, to Your faithful people pardon and peace!'

There is the joy of Adoption, the feeling that He is our Father and our Friend.

There is the joy of Faith — 'joy and peace in believing.'

There is the joy of a humble child-like Trust — knowing that we are in His safe hands.

There is the joy of a Holy Walk with God.

I will say nothing now of the joy that is set before us,' of that 'fullness of joy' which is at God's right hand, and of those pleasures which 'are for evermore.' When I speak of the Christian's life being a happy one, I do not mean merely that it leads to bliss hereafter — but that it is a happy life now. Let us then 'lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees.' Let us not live as slaves, but as the Lord's freemen. Let us not be always sighing as we journey heavenward; but let us 'go on our way rejoicing.' May God's promise be abundantly fulfilled to us, 'The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away!'

02.15. The Christian Life in Heaven

15. The Christian Life in Heaven

Fifty years hence — where shall you and I be? We shall probably have passed away from this world. Our places will be filled by others. Our houses will be occupied by other tenants. Another set of faces will be seen in our village or our town. Where shall we be? 'In our graves,' you will say. Yes, our bodies will be there, but not our souls. They can never die. They are immortal. Those who have lived here without God, and without hope — will be living still without Him in Hell, and hopelessly banished from His presence. But those of us who have been living that Christian life — that spiritual life of which I have spoken so often in the foregoing chapters — they will be still living that very same life which was begun here, but which will then be perfect and unbroken through eternity!! The Christian Life in Heaven — this is the closing subject of my Book.

O my God, if no good has been received from any of these chapters, bless this at least to the Reader. Or, if You have made them useful to anyone, oh grant a double blessing to these remaining words.

I shall speak of the Christian life in Heaven:

I. As a life of Service.

II. As a life of Holiness.

III. As a life of Happiness.

IV. As a life of a blessed Companionship.

V. As a life of Endless Duration.

I. The Christian Life in Heaven is a life of SERVICE. When John speaks of the happy world above, he says, 'There shall be no more curse — but the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it — and His servants shall serve Him!' Blessed be God, He allows us now to serve Him. If we are His people, our delight is to do His will. But oftentimes, when the spirit is willing — the flesh is sadly weak. Oftentimes we grieve to think that our hands are so feeble, and our hearts so cold. Our zeal flags. Our spiritual desires are checked. We grow faint and weary in well-doing. But in Heaven there will be no sins to hinder us — and no infirmities to weaken us!

Imagine what the service of the Angels must be. How readily and cheerfully they obey the summons of their Lord. Is there work to be done? Their language is, 'Here am I, Lord — send me.' Is there some relief to be given, some comfort to be carried, to one of God's suffering people? Their delight is to be the messengers and carriers of His mercy. 'Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation?' We know not how they help us — but they do help us — and not one is ever backward to perform his errand .

Now, this may give us some idea of the spirit in which our work will be done in Heaven. We know not what that work will be — but this we know, that God will ever have some holy, happy work for His people to perform. We shall enter upon our rest — and yet rest not day nor night. Our labors will be at an end — and yet we shall labor still. There will be work to do in God's Church above. There will be a choir of heavenly singers — and every voice and every heart will be in tune. There will be a glorious band of worshipers — and their thoughts will never wander, or their devotions flag. We shall be employed to carry out God's will in ways that we have no idea of now. Some think that many of those glittering stars we see, and their worlds, are filled with inhabitants. And perhaps God may have a message of mercy for us to carry to those worlds. Who knows? Who can say what blessed work the Lord may have in store for His gathered ones in Heaven? This we know, that the Christian Life there will be one of Service.

II. It will also be a life of HOLINESS. God's command to us now is, 'Be holy, for I am holy.' 'Be followers of God, as dear children.' 'Be therefore perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect.' But how miserably small is the degree of holiness which any of us reach! There are times when we grow, like plants in the garden of the Lord. We advance in grace, under the fostering care of the heavenly Gardener. But how constantly is our growth checked. How often are our leaves withered, and our blossoms nipped. How often does the cold blast of temptation fall upon us, and drive us back from the point which we had gained. 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect' — this is the constant complaint of the holiest Christian. But in Heaven it will be very different! We shall carry no body of sin with us there. Flesh and blood cannot enter there. There will be no more curse, no evil, no corruption, no infirmity, in that unfallen world. We shall all bear the image of God — we shall all be like Christ. Our love which is now so feeble — will be strong. Our faith, which is now so mixed with unbelief — will be pure and perfect. Our humility, which is often so spoiled by the creeping in of pride — will be the humility of a lowly but rejoicing heart. To know the will of God, to feel that our wills are in complete harmony with His, and to be ever doing not our will, but God's — this will be our delight!

Tell me, are you not constantly made sad by the risings of a sinful nature within you? When you would do good — evil is present with you. Are you not often reminded that you are still a prisoner here, tied and bound by the chain of your sins? Ah, the prison-door will soon be thrown open! Your prison dress will soon be laid aside. You will soon pass through the outer ward. You will soon breathe a purer air. You will soon gain your liberty, 'the glorious liberty of the children of God.' When the King comes in to see His guests, there will be none, not one, who does not have on the wedding garment. 'These are those who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' 'They are without fault before the throne of God!'

III. But let us think of the life in Heaven as one of HAPPINESS. Holiness and happiness are twins — they cannot be separated. Where there is true holiness — there must be true happiness.

There are many questions concerning Heaven which we cannot answer. Where will it be? We cannot tell you; for God has not revealed it. It may be far away in some distant planet. It may be here in this very world of ours — purified and fitted for our eternal residence.

What shall we be like in Heaven? What language shall we speak? We know not; and never shall we know, until we reach our Father's presence.

Never until then shall we know where Heaven is, or what it is. Nor does it matter. For if God spared not His own Son to redeem us — then nothing will be lacking to make us supremely happy. The Home of the Redeemed, the House of 'many mansions,' the Palace of the Great King — has joys which eye has never seen before, nor ear ever heard, and which it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive! Who can tell the blessedness of a ransomed soul when it reaches Heaven? We read that 'to die is gain' — not shall be gain at some future time, after a certain delay — but to die is gain — immediate gain. There is but one step — and the soul is in glory. Before the sounds of mourning have subsided in the chamber of death — the song of the upper sanctuary has begun. There is no delay — no waiting for an escort to conduct us along that untrodden path. On angels' wings, in angels' arms — Lazarus is borne to Abraham's bosom. The pardoned thief was that day 'with Christ in paradise.'

What makes God's people unhappy here on earth? What brings a cloud now and then over the brightness of our sunny life? What makes the rejoicing heart sometimes fall back into sadness? The presence of sin — but there shall be no more sin there. The assaults of the Tempter — but he cannot reach us there.

Doubts and misgivings as to our acceptance — but there shall be no more then. The trials of life — but they will be ended.

Affliction, pain, sickness — but these will be unknown in Heaven.

There is another thing too which sometimes distresses us; and that is our ignorance. There are some things in God's Word which we cannot understand, and many of the dealings of His providence perplex us. Now we see but dimly, as through a dark glass — but soon we shall see clearly. 'Now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I am known.' Who can tell the exceeding joy of having . . .

everything cleared up;

every mystery of His inscrutable Providence made plain;

every tangled thread unraveled?

What a blessed study will the past be — to look along the whole line that we have traveled since our birth, and not only to see how step by step the Lord has led us — but also why He led us in the way He did . . .

why He thwarted our plans here — and made them succeed there;

why He directed us to one place — rather than another;

why He appeared to prosper us at one time — and to chasten us at another;

why He sometimes seemed to be our Enemy — rather than our Friend.

It will be joy indeed, when our minds are capable of taking all this in, when 'we shall know even as we are known.' But does not this tell us that there is a lesson for us now to learn? When you read God's Word, remember the feebleness of your knowledge, and that there are many depths which you cannot fathom. Be thankful for what is plain — and leave what is difficult to be cleared up in

Heaven. The Holy Spirit will meanwhile teach you all that you need to know — if you earnestly apply for His gracious help.

Try and feel the same too, with regard to the Lord's providential dealings with you. Be patient, O child of God; be submissive to your Father's will. Accept His darkest dispensations cheerfully, thankfully, without a murmur. 'Be still, and know that He is God.' Wait a moment, and the shadows will flee away, and all will be clear. What you do not understand now — 'you shall know hereafter.'

IV. Our life in Heaven will be a life of blessed COMPANIONSHIP. 'We shall be ever with the Lord!' Not only under His care, as we are now — not merely near Him, as we may be even in this world — but actually with Him. This was His promise, 'If any man serve me, let him follow me; where I am, there shall my servant be.' And this was His prayer, 'Father, I will that those whom you have given me, be with me where I am.'

Happy were those who walked with Him along the plains of Galilee. Happy were those who were His close companions, when He dwelt among us. Happy were those who shared His trials and His joys. Happy were those who, like Mary, sat at His feet, and heard His words. We may well envy them. But we shall enjoy a yet higher privilege — we shall be with Him in His own glorious and eternal kingdom! But we shall have other companions. And who will they be? The angels, who have never sinned. The multitude too, whom no man can number, of God's saved ones, 'having their Father's name written in their foreheads.'

Such will be our companionship. Are we beginning to enjoy it now? Do we love the Savior? Are His people dear to us? Are our hearts drawn towards them — the holier they are, the more heavenly-minded, the more Christ-like? Are our happiest hours those which we spend in the Lord's courts, and with His people? Then we have already something of Heaven about us. We have a pledge of that inheritance which will one day be ours!

5. Once more — the Christian Life in Heaven will be one of ENDLESS DURATION. Everything about this poor world is fleeting, changing, temporary. Everything about the future world is fixed, lasting, endless. Whatever portion is ours — it will be unchangeable, eternal. 'He who is unjust' now — will be 'unjust still;' and 'he who is filthy' now — will be 'filthy still.' And 'he who is righteous' now — will be 'righteous still.' Our state in the eternal world will never alter. In Hell, the gnawing worm of conscience will never die — the fire of torment will never lose a particle of its heat. And so too the joys of Heaven will be unceasing, always full, and always new. The pleasures at Christ's right hand will be for evermore!

Oh, the littleness of all earthly things! What is pain for a few weeks or months? What are the pleasures which this world makes so much of? What are riches, and honors, and greatness? They are 'but for a moment,' compared with the Christian's 'eternal weight of glory!'

Learn, oh learn it in time — that everything here is quickly passing away, and that everything in Heaven is forever. To be forever safe — forever happy — to be forever with those who have been our Christian brethren on earth — to meet them again, never to be separated — to be ever with the Lord Himself — this will be our blessed portion, if we are Christ's. But are we His? Have we 'passed from death unto life?' Have we washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb? Are we children of His household, and subjects of His kingdom? Is Heaven already begun in us?

I have spoken of our life in Heaven being one of service — are we delighting in the Lord's service now?

I have spoken of it as a life of holiness — is ours a holy walk now?

I have spoken of it too as a life of happiness — are we already happy in Christ? Have we found peace in Him? Our companionship will be with the Lord, and with His saints — are such our companions now?

It is a great mistake to look upon Heaven merely as a place of reward, a sort of new life altogether different from this. No, it will be our present Christian life carried on and perfected in a better world! It will be the transplanting of the fruitful tree — to another and a richer soil. It will be the calling up of the faithful servant — to a higher and more honored post. And now I have been graciously permitted to carry out my purpose, and to finish this little Book. Both you and I must give an account of it. May we do it with joy and not with grief! May the Lord bless you, and make you a blessing to others! We shall only be a little while longer here. Oh, that our lives may be happy and useful! Oh, that our passage through this world may be a blessed one, and that we may shine hereafter 'as the brightness of the firmament' and 'as the stars forever and ever!'

03.00. Touchstones

Touchstones; Or,

Christian Graces and Characters Tested Ashton Oxenden, 1884 Courtesy www.gracegems.org

03.00c. Contents

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Under this heading I venture to publish a few thoughts on some of the leading points of character and conduct belonging to a true Christian. And surely it is very desirable, where our souls' interest is concerned, that our claim to that honored title should stand the test of God's Word — and that we should not rest satisfied with anything short of what is genuine and real. My desire is to speak in these Chapters with fidelity, as one who must soon give his final account; and at the same time with great tenderness and love, knowing how many defective points there are in my own character, when brought to the test of God's discriminating Word.

03.01. The Touchstone of FAITH

01. The Touchstone of FAITH With this subject I begin; and truly there are few subjects which have a greater claim on our attention — and especially at the present time, when there is so much to weaken and overthrow it. There is in these days a vast amount of unbelief, showing itself not only in France, in Germany, and in Italy, but even nearer our homes — in the midst of our Country, and in the heart of our beloved Church. To believe is spoken of in Scripture as essential to our salvation. It is the highest spiritual act of a child of God — and great is its power in our approaches to Him. 'All things (says the Savior) whatever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive.' And on one notable occasion, when a heart-broken parent came to Him, having failed to receive relief from His disciples, he thus imploringly addressed the Savior; 'If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.' To this our Lord replies, 'If you believe — all things are possible to him who believes' — all things, even the restoration of the poor, possessed child. The faith required of this person was such trust and confidence in the Savior as would lead him to put himself entirely in His hands. And this is precisely the kind of faith which He demands of us.

It is not the mere acknowledgment that there is a God above who has made us, and a Savior who has redeemed sinners. We may be fully persuaded of this, and yet be none the nearer to Heaven. Much more is needed — namely, to trust in that Savior, to venture everything upon Him, and to live for Him in this present world.

Neither, again, is it a mere expectation or hope — but feeling, living, and acting under the impression of an ever-present Friend and Deliverer. But it may be asked, 'Are we accountable for our faith? Is it a state of mind over which we have any control? If we do not believe — is it a sin, a positive sin, or merely our misfortune?' In answer to this question I would say, that God requires it of us — 'This is His commandment (says the Apostle), that we should believe on the name of his Son, Jesus Christ.' 'He who believes not God, has made him a liar, because he believes not the record that God gave of his Son.' And surely He never issues a command that we cannot obey. Where unbelief then is willful — it is clearly a sin, an act of rebellion against God. And the awful effect of it will be to close the door of mercy, and to place us among the lost; for it is written, 'He who believes not, is condemned already.'

We occasionally — not often — meet with people who are open and declared unbelievers. They even go so far as to boast of their rejection of God's truth, as though there was a kind of manliness and courage in asserting their freedom from its restraints. Thank God, there are probably none such among my present readers; for happily such people are not often met with, and such a book as this would not be likely to attract them.

There is in the present day, however, a class of people — frequently young men — who have acquired a little smattering of science, and pride themselves on making discoveries which seem to contradict the teaching of God's Word. They feel at liberty to play fast and loose with the most sacred truths — and take a pleasure in unsettling the minds of others. And is not this intellectual skepticism growing among us? I fear it is. It seems to have taken the place of that cold, dry, formal

assent to religious truth, with which so many contented themselves in days gone by. They were satisfied with being Christians in name — but the truth is, that there never existed in them any real faith in the Savior, or any true love for Him. And therefore, although they professed to believe in Christ, there was an absence of all living faith in their hearts. There are many who have inherited from their forefathers a kind of traditional religion — but it has been of a cold and formal type, and therefore worthless. They had no real faith — their belief was a mere imagination — it had no life in it. This they discovered to their cost. The consequence is that they have cast off what was a mere semblance, and have allowed themselves to drift on the wave of free thought. And now they question everything, and find themselves plunged into the most miserable unbelief, either concealing within their hearts a secret skepticism, or else unblushingly avowing themselves to be unbelievers.

It is difficult to say which state is the worst — the former state of cold indifference, which in fact amounted to hidden unbelief; or the present open avowal of semi-skepticism. In any case, the presence of unbelief in the heart is an offence to God, and separates the soul from Him. The fact is, that a person may be outwardly well conducted; he may pass muster as a worthy member of the Church, and may even show zeal in its welfare — but if he believes not, he has no part whatever with Christ. And if he remains in this state, his case becomes utterly hopeless — it is beyond a remedy! For remember, the great indictment against a man need not be on account of any specific sin which he has committed, but simply because 'he has not believed the record which God gave of his Son.' In truth, there is no sin so great, or so fatal, as unbelief. There is no sin, according to God's estimate, of deeper dye. It is a sin which man alone can be guilty of. It cannot be laid to the charge of fallen angels. Along their gloomy coasts, no tidings of redeeming love have ever echoed. Salvation has never been offered to them. No, it is especially man's sin. It is the sin of sins, the master sin, the sin which is the root and parent of all sins — for is it not written, 'He who does not believe the Son of God shall not see life — but the wrath of God abides on him!'

Oh the misery of this state of unbelief! A person may have been long possessed by it; and it may have surrounded his heart with a thick crust, which the sharpest arrow of conviction cannot penetrate. Or he may have recently had his feelings injured by it. Once he followed Christ. Once his heart was warmed by the sunshine of His love. But now all is changed. There is a dark cloud which shuts Him completely out. He is filled with doubts — and all peace is gone from him. He is like a vessel which has no pilot to direct it, and no helm to steer it — tossed hither and thither by opposing waves.

I will now pass on to a totally different phase of unbelief, which I will characterize as involuntary — for it takes possession of the mind wholly against our will. There are people who are assailed by temptations to unbelief, but it is against their will. The unbelief of such is hateful to them — it is their misery. They feel it to be a dead weight bearing them down — and they long to get rid of it, and to mount upward on the joyous wings of an unfettered trust.

You will bear in mind the distinction I am drawing between willful and deliberate unbelief — and that which is involuntary and unwelcome; the unbelief which a person encourages and glories in — and the unbelief which he groans over, and from which he earnestly desires to be freed.

It has been remarked that our Lord's enemies, the Sadducees doubted — and so did His disciple Thomas. But what a wide difference between the two! The doubt of the Sadducee was the cold, calculating doubt of a skeptical and unloving heart — the doubt of Thomas was an honest doubt, a doubt that arose from a certain infirmity of character, and which caused him sore uneasiness. The one was, I might almost say, the doubt of love — the other the doubt of indifference; one the doubt of a weak, but loyal servant — the other the doubt of a rebel. They both craved a sign; and while our Lord denied it to the one, He mercifully gave it to the other. And we have reason to believe that the Sadducee remained locked up in his wretched skepticism — while we know that the Disciple was brought to a full and earnest reception of the Savior, so that he gave Him the entire allegiance of his heart, exclaiming, 'My Lord and my God!'

Now, I believe that there are people like Thomas to be met with everywhere — people who are troubled at times with unbelieving thoughts and feelings; and the earnest desire of their souls is, that they may be enabled to overcome them. The world has not perhaps an idea of what is passing in their minds — and does not suspect that there is any impediment which makes the chariot wheels of their faith at times drag heavily. But so it is. And I feel that their case needs to be handled with tenderness, and calls out the special sympathy of the Christian teacher. Well may his heart bleed for them — while they mourn over their unbelief, and would give worlds to have it removed.

I will now mention some of the causes of this peculiar phase of unbelief, which you will remember I have called involuntary, because it lingers in the heart against our will.

First, it may arise from the particular character of a person's mind. There are some minds, which are naturally cold and suspicious. They are slow to receive any truth, whether it be of a spiritual or of a purely intellectual nature. Their bent is to weigh and measure every side of a question, and rather to look for the difficulties in it — than at once to embrace it as a whole.

Now, with such a condition of mind, but little can be done — until its wretched narrowness is broken through, and its icy coldness thawed. I believe that nothing but the grace of God can remedy its defects. The heart needs to be renewed and remolded, by the almighty Spirit of God; and the conscience so thoroughly awakened, that it shall feel its needs of just such a Savior as the gospel reveals to us.

Another cause of this unbelief may be, that the person suffering from it has been perhaps thrown among godless men — for we often find to our cost that this evil disease of unbelief is sadly contagious. A young man, for instance, has been brought up religiously. He has imbibed pious thoughts and feelings from those nearest and dearest to him. He goes into the world, and mixes with others. Bad men, as well as good, come across his path. He hears one speaking of sin with a degree of approval which at first shocks him — but he becomes used to it. He hears another holding up religion to ridicule — this makes him feel at the moment utterly powerless to stand up in its defense; and under the cowardly attack which is made upon him, his ground gives way. Then a third starts actual objections to revealed truth, and uses some specious argument, which cannot easily be met by him.

Now, these objections, and that argument, though spoken at random, stay with him. He cannot get rid of them. They haunt him like an evil spirit. They have broken down the barrier, and he cannot

easily repair it. The bloom and freshness of his earlier feelings have been rubbed off, and his spiritual health has received a shock, from which the recovery is often difficult.

Thus many a one, who perhaps has entered the world with right feelings — comes out of it with his mind soiled and tainted for years to come! The arrow of skepticism has struck him, and he cannot rid himself of the pain and injury which it has inflicted on him. The seed has been sown — and alas, it bears its bitter fruit. The poison has been imbibed — and it affects his whole spiritual system. For we all know, that although the effects of the deadliest poison may be remedied at the time — but if it is allowed to rest undisturbed in the system, even for a few minutes, it is fatal, and the strongest antidote cannot neutralize it!

How necessary then to guard against the first infusion of evil! And the moment we feel its power, at once to expel the intruder. For if we encourage even the little beginnings of unbelief, instead of casting them out — they will be sure to have a deadly influence over our hearts.

There is a third cause, which is, I fear, the parent of unbelief in some hearts. I mean the indulgence of sin — not of open sin perhaps (for many would start back with horror at the idea of such an imputation), but of some secret, hidden, heart sin — which probably the world does not detect. Nothing warps and distorts the moral symmetry of the inner man, so much as secret sin. It deteriorates the heart. And most assuredly, if sin is allowed a resting place within us — then God Himself will soon be put away, His truth will become distasteful to us, and we shall settle down into a state of cold, heartless unconcern! And is there not yet another way in which unbelief presents itself, which is by no means uncommon? How often does a passing doubt — an occasional misgiving — come across the mind even of the earnest Christian? He sits down to read the Bible — that book which is so precious to his soul — and the Tempter whispers in his ear, 'Is this really from God? Is it His message to me?' Perhaps your heart within is able at once to answer the question. You have tasted of the preciousness of God's Word, and you feel it to be from Him. Or you kneel down in your secret chamber, to spend a few minutes in prayer; and even while you are on your knees before God, the thought comes across you, 'Does God indeed hear me? And will He answer my supplications?' And then you happily remember how in days gone by He has heard and answered you, and revealed Himself to your soul as He does not unto the world. Well indeed if it be so with us. But it may be otherwise. The evil when begun, may go on increasing, until your spiritual comfort may be completely undermined by it. And yet God may bring good out of evil. Although these thoughts are very apt to leave their trace behind them, causing us much pain and uneasiness within — He may allow us to be assailed by them, and may use them as 'touchstones,' to test the genuineness of our faith. Like the passing wind, they may try our very roots, but make us perhaps cling more tightly to the ground on which we are resting. And thus 'the trial of our faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes,' will be 'found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.'

Here then I must close this section. I have mentioned four not unusual phases of that involuntary unbelief, which I have desired chiefly to bring before you — and which, if not removed, are calculated to give pain to many hearts. I leave them with you for the present. Think them over. And may the discovery of this evil within you be one step towards its removal! In this next section I shall speak both of the Remedy, and of the Physician who is ever ready to apply it. Meanwhile carefully examine your own heart; and pray that Christ may graciously manifest Himself to you — removing

all your doubts, and filling you with joy and peace in believing. In the last section I spoke to you of Voluntary and Involuntary Unbelief — the former most hateful to God, as showing a mind in direct rebellion against Him, and effectually closing the open door of mercy; the latter distressing to the individual Christian, and calling forth our pity, rather than our indignation.

I dwelt chiefly on this latter phase, Involuntary Unbelief, and showed that it chiefly arises from one of these four causes:

from the peculiar character of a person's mind;

from the fact of our being thrown in with godless people;

from the encouragement of some hidden sin within us;

lastly, from some temptation, to which even a child of God is liable. And now I am to try and help you in the expulsion of so unwelcome an intruder.

I will suppose I am speaking to one in whose heart there is at the present moment some symptom of this unbelief. It is there — and though you would give worlds to displace it, you have no power of your own to effect its removal. What is to be done? Your obvious relief is in Prayer. God is the Giver of all true Faith. Entreat Him to take away that evil heart of unbelief, which, like an insidious cancer, has been long striking its roots deep within you — and to give you a believing, loving, trusting heart. Let this be the one main petition you urge with Him — not coldly or formally, but earnestly and heartily; not once or twice, but day by day; and He will not deny your request, or allow you to remain long unrelieved.

You cannot heartily love and serve God as you are. Your unbelief must be expelled, and a settled faith must be given you. And remember, this is one of those 'good and perfect gifts,' which 'comes from above.' Faith is not a plant which springs up of its own accord in the human heart. It is an exotic, and must be transplanted there from another and a heavenly soil. Ask God for this precious gift — and by direct prayer to Him you will surely obtain, sooner or later, the comfort which you so much need. Whenever then you hear the whisperings of unbelief within you, undermining your spiritual comfort, and keeping you from God — instantly approach your heavenly Father; tell Him of your trouble, and plead with Him for its speedy removal. Say to Him, 'O You who are ever ready to help Your poor weak servant — be pleased in mercy to extricate me from these doubts, which are so miserably impeding the very life of my soul, and grant me the priceless blessing of a true and living faith.'

Further, try to realize the preciousness and nearness of the Savior. Put yourself in His actual presence, and entreat Him to befriend you. He invites all to come to Him who are weary, and need His aid. Draw near to Him, then, and He will give you the rest which you are sighing for, showing you plainly His truth, and revealing Himself to your soul. Place yourself at His feet. Give yourself to Him heart and soul.

You have perhaps hitherto followed Him, but it has been afar off. You have been afraid to take up His cross, for you have dreaded its weight. You have hesitated to yield up your affections and your will to Him — and therefore He has stood aloof from you, and has been as a Stranger to you. But now surrender yourself wholly to Him, without reserve — and forthwith your doubts will disperse like noxious vapors, the light of Heaven will shine in upon you, and joy and peace will be your

portion. But you will say perhaps, 'My views concerning Christ are at present sadly defective. I need to be more fully persuaded as to His nature and His power to save me. For how can I heartily embrace Him as my Savior, while these doubts of mine are keeping me back?' But let me ask you, Do you understand the nature of the Sun which shines in the heavens? Do you know all about that great luminary? Probably not — but still you draw near to it, and are warmed. And so it may be with Jesus, 'the Sun of Righteousness.' Oh, place yourself within His influence, and let His rays of light shine upon your soul. Remember, your Savior loves you, and is willing (oh, how willing!) to impart unto you His most precious gifts. He feels for you, for He knows all your infirmities; and since He Himself has suffered, being tempted — He is able to support those who are tempted.

You have perhaps read many books, and some of these have rather added to your perplexities, than removed them. But now you come to Him, in whom all fullness dwells — to Him in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. You drink at that Fountain Head, and your soul is calmed, refreshed, and satisfied.

It is said of Pascal (a holy man and one of great intellect) that when, after reading many deep books, he found them utterly powerless to give him relief — he at length came back to God, threw himself upon Him, and, shedding tears of joy, exclaimed, 'O God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob — not the God of philosophers and wise men — I come to You.'

Those were the noble words of a great mind, which felt its littleness, and that God alone could reveal Himself to the heart. And does not this remind us of One greater than Pascal, who exclaimed with joy, 'I thank You, Father, Lord of Heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent, and have revealed them unto babes!'

Yes, try to exercise your faith — the little faith you have, which can hardly be called faith, it is so mixed with unbelief — try and exercise it. And, like the man whose hand was paralyzed, and in the act of stretching it out received strength — so will your withered faith be strengthened by the Lord Himself. Place yourself at the Savior's feet with a soul-felt homage; and as you trust Him He will enable you to trust Him more. The daily Reading of God's Word is another important remedy. And although perhaps your mind at the time may not be disposed heartily to welcome all its statements, still read it solemnly and prayerfully, as one who longs to find the treasure it contains. Read it with humility and devoutness, and entreat God to teach you by His Holy Spirit.

Wait upon God too, in the more Public Ordinances of His own House, remembering that a special blessing comes from United Worship and the Preaching of God's Word; and that Faith, the Faith you long for, 'comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.' And what shall I say about the Holy Communion? Your state of partial unbelief scarcely warrants your admission to this, the highest of Christian ordinances, which demands the entire allegiance of our hearts. And yet I dare not advise you to stay away, until your doubts are removed. It would be like saying to some poor sufferer, 'Wait until your malady is cured — and then place yourself under the physician's care.' I would rather say, 'Come — the Lord has a remedy for earnest, seeking souls. He has a remedy for you. He longs to heal you, and to give you 'the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.'

Yes, if your doubts distress you, and if your heart's desire is to have the little faith you possess strengthened — then entreat the loving Savior to accept you, and to permit you, unworthy as you

are, to take the very lowest seat at His Banquet. And when there, may your Lord in His great mercy 'make Himself known to you in the breaking of bread!" But you will perhaps say, 'How can I profitably use these different means of grace, seeing I have so little faith?' Are not Prayer, and Bible Reading, Public Worship, and Holy Communion, direct calls upon faith? Are they not absolutely worthless without it? Yes, it is so. But in the humble, earnest effort to use them — God will meet you with His blessing. Remember the case which I have mentioned of the man with the withered hand.

Once more, engage in some directly Christian work. Exercise is needful for the body. Your limbs, if unused, soon become weak and powerless. Employ them, and their strength returns. So it is with your poor imperfect faith. Give it some employment. Do some act for Christ in the world. Engage in some definite work for Him, and you will find light. 'He who follows Me, shall not walk in darkness.'

Such is my advice to anyone, the language of whose heart is at this moment, 'Lord, increase my faith!' But let me add a word of WARNING, of affectionate warning, to anyone who is daring to encourage the deadly fungus of unbelief in his soul. Do not, I beseech you, play with God's truth. Do not trifle with it. And, above all, beware how you seek to disseminate the miserable seeds of doubt, which are, alas, embedded in your own heart. It is cruel, selfishly cruel, to leaven others with that which (if you would own it) has a withering influence on your own heart, and is the very plague-spot of your life. I would rather say, 'Give up your hopeless opposition, and humble yourself before the great truths of God.' Thus your present skepticism, which leaves you without hope in life, and without an anchor to cling to in death — will be exchanged for a wiser and happier course.

I cannot now close this subject without mentioning two or three DIFFICULTIES which may possibly present themselves to your mind. The first suggests itself in this shape: 'My earnest desire is to love and serve Christ — but I have so many of these doubts, that I fear He will not accept me, and that my state of mind is beyond a cure.' It is true that your condition is painful — but it is better, far better, than that of one altogether dead and unconcerned. Better to be feeling after Christ, though you cannot lay hold of Him as you would — better to touch even the outer hem of His garment, though you can get no nearer, than to be cold and indifferent about Him. Be assured, He knows all your difficulties, and all your weaknesses — and loves you in spite of them.

Again, a person may feel that he cannot take in the arguments which convince others. His mind is of such a texture that the clearest evidences do not impact upon him.

Now, the religion of Christ has its proofs for all earnest seekers. One is convinced by arguments which satisfy the understanding. In the case of another, the heavenly truths which God's Word contains commend themselves to the heart, and plainly declare themselves to be from Him. For there are many who are no theologians, and yet they are quite satisfied as to the truth of the gospel, having 'the witness in themselves.' The best and strongest proofs, after all, are those which are common both to the ignorant and the learned; namely, those which speak to the awakened conscience, and to the heart which thirsts for pardon, love, and peace. There are probably thousands of humble-minded Christians who know nothing of proofs, nothing of evidences, nothing of arguments — but still they believe, and are blessed.

Further, you perhaps complain of the weakness and littleness of your faith. But it is well if you have even the germ of true faith within you — though it be sadly mixed, and almost overpowered by unbelief. In the case of the father who came to Jesus with his afflicted child, his prayers showed a weak, though a true, faith — 'If You can do anything, help us.' A severe Master would have rejected such a prayer at once. But not so with Jesus. He accepts the tenderest bud of living faith, and He will assuredly accept ours.

Strong faith is what we should all desire, and seek for — but even in its weak state it may put forth its hand, and grasp the prize, saying, 'Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief.'

Lastly, the difficulty of reconciling the various dealings of God with men, and of making Scripture statements entirely harmonize, is a serious stumbling-block to some. And so it must ever be with our defective understandings. Be content then with the thought that we all now see through a glass darkly; we know but in part — but we shall hereafter have every mystery cleared; we shall 'know even as we are known.' May God grant that you and I may one day enjoy the unspeakable blessing of an assured and unclouded faith! 'Blessed are those who have not seen — and yet have believed.' Blessed is he . . .

who has a sure anchorage even in the roughest storm,

finds peace in the hour of death,

commits his soul calmly and trustfully to his Savior, and

wakes up to exchange his imperfect faith for sight, and his wavering hope for everlasting enjoyment in the very presence of his Lord!

03.02. The Touchstone of LOVE

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'Faith works by love' — and if our faith is true, it will show itself in feelings and acts of love. Do we believe in a person, so as to trust him implicitly, and take him as our guide, and follow him as our leader? If we are persuaded of his wisdom, his integrity, and his affection towards us — then we shall also love him.

How was it with regard to our Lord? When He came among us on His errand of love — there were many who saw no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. But still there was here and there a loving heart that responded to His love. They rallied around Him. They gave Him their whole hearts. They sacrificed everything for His sake — father and mother, children and possessions — they left all to follow Him!

We can imagine how these His disciples hung upon His lips — how they drank in His words of wisdom — how sweet His companionship was to them — how they ran to Him in every difficulty, and poured all their sorrows into His sympathetic ear. He was unlike any other friend, for He was always accessible. He had a heart to feel for them, and power to relieve them — whenever they came to Him. He had right counsel for every case — and a remedy for every ill. Those two or three years which they spent in His society must have been years of much blessedness and peace. Every day they must have grown in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. Their state of mind was somewhat different from ours — and yet not altogether so. It was different, inasmuch as they saw Him — but we see Him not. It was the same, inasmuch as they loved Him, and we may love Him too. And surely to love a seen Savior, and to love an unseen one, equally requires grace.

You may think it was far easier for Matthew and John, for Lazarus and the Marys, to love Christ, and to follow in His footsteps — than it is for us. They could behold Him with their bodily eyes. They could read His character, which was ever open to their view. They could put themselves in His actual presence. Was it not easy then for them to love Him — far easier than for us? No, I believe not; for the same preparation of heart was needed in their case, as in ours. The same power was needed to bend their wills, and attract their affection. That saying of our Lord's was as true of them, as of ourselves, 'No man can come unto me, except the Father who has sent me, draws him.' Indeed there is a special blessing promised to us, who are debarred from the privilege which the early Christians, the Apostles for instance, enjoyed; for you remember what our Lord said to Thomas, 'Because you have seen me — you have believed: blessed are they that have not seen — and yet have believed.'

Some kinds of love are natural to us. The mother loves her child, even though that child may be unlovely, and even repulsive. Yet the mother loves it with all its bodily deformity, or mental weakness. We love our relatives too — no one can take their place in our affections. We love our country — the fairest land is not to be compared with it. And if there is one spot in the wide world which is dearer to us than any other, it is the home of our birth, of our childish days, and of our

riper years. The love of these is, I say, natural to us. The brute animals share it with us in a measure. The fierce lioness is tender over her young. The swallow in its migrations remembers its nest, and year after year returns to it. The dog follows the steps of its master, and mourns at his grave, as for a lost friend. But the love of One who is unseen is not of nature's teaching, but of grace. It must be shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us. God Himself must plant it within us. Heavenly love is the most powerful and permeating grace which can possess the soul. Even natural love is a charming and beautiful feature in the character — how much more that love which is spiritual and heaven-born. It has been said, 'The soul in which this commanding affection is lacking, may now and then breathe out a rich tone, and sound its snatches of broken melody; but it is a lyre without its chief string, an organ with its central octave silent.'

Now, this feeling of love must be cultivated by us. We must ask God to take away our naturally hard and worldly heart, and to give us a new heart — tender, loving, and trustful. This blessed gift is obtained by Prayer — by direct application to God. And when obtained, it must be nurtured and kept alive by those means of grace which He has provided for us, such as . . .

private communion with God;

meditating on the Savior's love;

drawing near to Him, as to a friend;

meeting Him where He loves to meet us, in His House, and at His holy Table.

Thus, and thus only, can we love our unseen Lord, and grow in His love day by day.

Indeed faith and love are very close companions. One cannot exist without the other. We must believe in Jesus — or we cannot love Him: 'Whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.' The soul which so believes in Jesus, cannot fail to love Him. It is true that the eye is the ordinary door, by which love enters into us — and in one sense it is so also spiritually, in the case of the true Christian, for he loves his Lord, believing on Him, that is seeing Him with the eye of faith. Yes, faith is the eye which pierces the clouds, and discovers Christ! Faith is the eye of the new creature.

Faith is also the hand that lays hold of Him, the grip that embraces Him, the foot that follows Him. Many people read in the Gospel a glowing description of Christ; they find there a beautiful picture of Him — but there they stop. But something more is needed, even faith. For faith believes this report, and beholds this picture — and so lets in the love of Christ to the soul. Faith, in fact, is the parent, the groundwork, of love — the door by which alone it gains an entrance into the soul.

I have said that this feeling of love must be cultivated. It must be fostered and nurtured in the soul. It is a most precious possession — but how can it be obtained? How can this holy feeling of love be acquired?

'Love (says the Apostle) is of God.' It comes from Him. It is a heaven-born gift. It must be 'shed abroad in our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit.' Most clearly then it must be sought by Prayer. We must plead for it with the Great Giver. We must apply earnestly for it. And oh that a spark may come down from Heaven, and light up a pure flame within our souls! But in addition to Prayer, for the cultivation of this grace — we shall do well also to practice Holy Meditation. Try to realize the

fact that God loves you — that Christ loves you. This will, above all things, awaken within your soul a love towards Him. 'We love him — because he first loved us.' Certainly we ought to love God; and we shall love Him, if our hearts are right with God. Love begets love. Love is the motive power within us. Love melts the frozen and pent-up streams, and makes the waters flow. Heavenly love is the master-key which unlocks our closed hearts. In fact, let anyone be fully persuaded of the exceeding loveliness of God's character, and of His special love to us — and this will effectually win him over, and make him give his whole heart to God. This should be our feeling — God loves me! Jesus loves me! Therefore I will no longer live for sin and for the world — but for Him. 'The love of Christ constrains us.' It is a strong magnet, drawing us to Him. But there is another important point; namely, that if this love is genuine, it will be effectual. What, then, will be the effect of the true love of God in our souls? I might mention many most blessed effects — but I will confine myself to three.

First, if the love of God reigns supreme in our hearts — it will effectually drive out every intruder. It is utterly impossible that the love of God — and also the love of sin or the world, can exist in the same soul. The sins to which we once clung — will forthwith be expelled; and the trifles for which we had once so greedy an appetite — will lose their charm; for God has better pleasures for our enjoyment.

Again, God's love in our hearts will be found to be the mightiest power to insure obedience. When our Lord invites us to make a sacrifice, and to suffer for Him, the world pronounces such a command to be intolerable. But love is prepared to obey. When He says, 'Take my yoke and my burden upon you' — then love instantly makes the yoke easy, and the burden light. For we all know that on the back, as it were, of love — a burden loses more than half its weight, and that the work which is done for love becomes a pleasure and a delight. Love welcomes hardships, and glories in tribulation.

Why is it that the slave, who has gained his freedom, still works for his former master? Why does that mother watch so tenderly over her sickly child, counting days of anxiety and nights of watching, as nothing? It is in both cases, love. And so, if we love God, our great delight will be to work for Him, and to do His will.

Further, this love of God will incline us to live very near to Him, the life of a true disciple. Are you prepared to do this? Is it possible for any one of my readers — whether he is a person surrounded by worldliness, or one immersed in business, or a boy or girl at school — is it possible for such a one to live a holy and pious life? Thank God, it is possible — and if I could know your heart, there may be at this moment an earnest desire in you to live such a life.

Well, there is much to be done. There is a battle to be fought, and a victory to be won. But you will say, 'I have but little strength.' I know it is so. But what may not be accomplished by a loving heart, which, conscious of its own utter weakness, clings to the Almighty Savior, and borrows power from Him! I can do all things through Christ, who strengthened me!

Go forward then, dear reader, full of faith, full of trust, looking up to Him who loves you, and giving yourself to Him who is the Hope, and Strength, and Life of your Soul!

03.03. The Touchstone of CONVICTION OF SIN

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I wish to speak in this chapter about the nature of sin, and to point out what Paul calls its 'exceeding sinfulness.' And surely if this evil is actually dwelling within us, it is the height of folly to hide it from ourselves. But on the contrary it is our wisdom to discover it, and to inquire how we may rid ourselves of it. Yes, if there is an enemy within that troubles us — if there is a deadly disease which weakens and undermines our spiritual health — it is indeed a blessing if we can dislodge it from its stronghold. And further, if there is such a blessing as forgiveness with God, and if there is a way of destroying sin, and introducing holiness in its place — it is well to direct our thoughts to it, and to make it the subject of our prayers.

What is sin? In the world's eye, there are certain offences which it pronounces sinful. Dishonesty for instance, drunkenness, and acts of violence — it unsparingly condemns; and against these the laws of the country even protest. But this is only a partial view to take of sin. What is sin in God's sight?

'Sin (says John) is the transgression of the law.' Everything which is contrary to God's will, and every breach of His command, is sin. It may be open, or it may be hidden; it may rest in the heart, and never leave its hiding-place; we may intend to do a wrong thing, and never have an opportunity of doing it — but it is equally sinful in God's sight, though not in man's.

God also looks upon every sin as an offence against Him. We may, for instance, injure a fellow-creature and do him much harm; but the wrong is not merely against him, but against God. Thus, when David took away Uriah's wife from him, he did not merely do a grievous injury to Uriah — but his offence was against God; so that when he was brought to see the greatness of his sin, this was his language; 'Against You, You only have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight!' Doubtless he had wronged Uriah — grievously wronged him — he had done him an irreparable injury; but this was nothing compared with the sin which he had committed against God; for sin is the transgression of His law. This thought seemed to fill him with sorrow, and make him tremble before God. The same feeling was also in Joseph's mind, when temptation suddenly came in his way. He immediately exclaimed — not, 'How can I risk the loss of my good character, or how can I bring sorrow into the house of my master Potiphar' — but 'How shall I do this great wickedness — and sin against God?'

Look upon sin then, every sin, as a direct offence against God Himself. The world may know nothing of it; our fellow men, even our nearest friends, may not suspect it. We ourselves may have thought lightly of it, and it may soon have been forgotten. But still all sin is recorded in God's memory — and if not forgiven and put away, it will rise up in judgment against us!

Again, the greatness of a sin in the world's estimate in a measure depends upon its discovery. There are many who go on for years in acts of dishonesty, or acts of impurity, or acts of ungodliness — but a curtain is drawn over it all — it is hidden from view — and the person

preserves his good name, and is perhaps highly esteemed among men. But all the while God knows his true character. He looks within, into the very depths of the heart — and not a thought, not a desire, not a single action escapes His all-searching eye! This is the God with whom we have to do — a heart-searching, a heart-trying, a heart-knowing God! And therefore in that beautiful prayer, which we use before the reading of His Commandments, we address Him as 'Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden;' and then we ask Him to 'Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by His Holy Spirit.'

Another thing that I will mention with regard to sin, is its greatness. The world talks of small sins, trifling sins, pardonable sins — but no sins are small in God's sight. Every sin is an abomination to Him. He is 'of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity.' He is a holy God, and sin is His abhorrence. His Word declares that 'The wages of sin is death!' 'The soul that sins it shall surely die!' 'He will by no means clear the guilty.' It was sin that brought the Savior into the world — and it was sin that nailed Him to the cross! It was sin, one sin, that expelled our First Parents from God's happy presence in the garden of Eden. And if we are excluded forever from the heavenly paradise, it will be our sin that is the cause.

It has been remarked by Farrar, that 'it only takes one step to land us in the wrong path; but after that one step comes another and another; and little by little, and step by step, the wrong path may lead you as far astray as the distance between Heaven and Hell.' We all know that a boy by mere carelessness, by playing with gunpowder, by neglecting a sprain, by lying for five minutes on the damp grass — may lay in himself the seeds of a disease or an agony, which may end only with his life. But be sure — and this is a far more solemn truth — that it is so also morally.

Beware then, oh beware of encouraging the smallest sin — of letting in the smallest drop of that which may poison and ruin your soul — and that forever! But there is this remarkable thing about sin, to which I will now call your special attention. It may, and often does, exist within us, and yet cause us no uneasiness. We may be unconscious of its presence, and we may be happy even, while it is ruining us. It is only when God by His Holy Spirit awakens us, and shows us what we really are — that we begin to be troubled. Then we see sin in its true light, and feel that it is 'exceeding sinful.'

Now then for something practical.

We have seen what the nature of sin is — that it is the transgression or breaking of God's law, and an offence against God Himself.

We have seen that sin is great and soul-ruining.

We have seen that sin is a hidden evil, of which we are often unconscious.

Now, let me implore you not to let an hour pass without calling your sins to remembrance. Let me entreat you to take a backward glance, and a very solemn review of the past. Try and refresh your memory with regard to your forgotten sins. They may have been committed long ago — but still they are lying at your door.

Confess them to God. He knows them even more accurately than we know them ourselves — but He will have us acknowledge them. Tell them out to Him one by one, and let none be passed by.

Seek for their entire removal. How? There is but one remedy for us, but one Paymaster who can discharge our debt. The blood of Jesus Christ alone can cleanse us from past sin. Go to the Cross, and lay down your burden there — your heavy burden — your enormous burden — your burden which has been accumulating year after year — that burden which weighs down your soul, and keeps it from rising heavenwards. Thank God, we have in Christ 'Redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins!'

Go to the Cross daily and hourly, not only to obtain pardon — but also to keep alive in your soul an abiding impression of the deep and awful nature of sin. Remember it was sin that caused your Savior all His sorrows. It made His heart constantly bleed when upon earth. Oh then, how much evil there must have been in it! How much poison in sin — to require such a remedy to destroy it! Learn from this to tremble at sin. Plague, pestilence, and famine are nothing compared to sin — these weaken the body, but sin ruins the soul!

Oh for a truer and deeper conviction of sin! Oh that God may show it to us in all its deep colors! Oh that our conscience may be awakened, so that we may smite upon our breasts and cry for mercy! For unless we feel our sins, we shall never seek to rid ourselves of them. And though we may have obtained forgiveness through God's infinite mercy, still the smart of sin will ever remain in us, and it ought to remain — for though the wound may be entirely healed, the scar remains to remind us of the past, and to keep us humble. And now let me apply the Touchstone. Is sin a real trouble to you? Do you hate it? Is it loathsome to your sight? Can you truly say that the remembrance of our sins is grievous unto us — and the burden of them is intolerable? Have you taken your sins to the Cross, and are you ever taking them there, to have them crucified with Christ, and expelled by Him? May God help you to do so!

03.04. The Touchstone of REPENTANCE

04. The Touchstone of REPENTANCE

Repentance is a state of mind which God requires of those whom He receives into His favor. In our last Chapter we considered the subject of Conviction of sin. There must be Conviction of sin, before we repent. Conviction of sin is the first waking up of the slumbering and self-satisfied soul — the first pang which leads to repentance. But how shall I describe what real Repentance is?

It is not mere sorrow. It is true, there can be no repentance without sorrow — but there may be sorrow, great sorrow, without repentance.

Judas, the moment he had betrayed his Lord, suffered the most intense anguish; for he felt that 'he had betrayed the innocent blood' — and he even went so far as to take back the bribe which he had received, and return it to the chief priests. His however was remorse, and not repentance — it was 'the sorrow of the world that works death.'

Achan too was sorry; but it was merely because his theft was detected, and brought home to him — there was however no contrition in his heart.

Again, repentance is not a mere momentary feeling that we are wrong. A person may be aroused by a striking sermon, or some remark in a religious book — and thoughts of better things may spring up in his mind. But it may be only as a passing cloud, or as the early dew, or as the crackling of thorns under a pot. In a few hours, he may rock his soul to sleep again. A sudden death, for instance, may occur in a family; and this may startle us, and lead us to ask ourselves, 'Am I ready to die?' Our home is turned into a house of mourning; and this may make us very thoughtful. And yet we may be like a bar of iron heated at the forge — which is no sooner taken out of the furnace, and brought into contact with the outer world, than it begins to grow cold and hard again. But real repentance has certain marks, which are sure to characterize it.

First, there will be that waking up to the full consciousness of sin, which I have already spoken of. I have said that there is one remarkable thing about the nature of sin — that we are often unconscious of its presence within us. Yes, and a person may live on for years — yes, during a whole life — utterly unconscious of the evil within him, and without any feeling of alarm at the danger which is before him!

What a mercy then it is, when God arouses us from this deadly sleep — no matter how He does it. It may be by some painful event; it may be by something which causes us great misery for a time — no matter, so long as God in His great mercy arouses us from our spiritual slumber, and stops us in our headlong course — just as a man would feel thankful, if, when walking in his sleep, he were rudely seized and turned back, at the moment when he was on the very brink of danger!

Manasseh's affliction was severe — but it was a blessing to him. The Prodigal's destitution in a far country was very painful — but without it he would not have come to himself. When Peter met the Savior's searching eye, that look made him weep bitterly — but it was the means of saving his

soul. David's sorrow was almost more than he could bear — but he looked back upon it afterwards with great thankfulness, saying, 'It is good for me that I have been afflicted. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept Your Word.'

But, secondly, in every case of True Repentance there will not only be a consciousness of sin, but also a desire and determination to put sin away. Its presence will be hateful to us, and we shall long to be freed from it. 'I abhor myself!' said Job, 'and repent in dust and ashes!' We shall be grieved and humbled before God, not so much for the punishment which we have deserved — as because He is dishonored by our sin, and our own soul is defiled by it.

It is painful to see how some people trifle with sin, and how lightly they speak of it, as something which perhaps had better be avoided — but not as that which calls down God's anger, which grievously offends Him, and which made the Savior bleed upon the Cross! It will never be so with a real penitent. He will ever speak of sin with horror — and the thought of it will grieve him to his dying hour.

Thirdly, there will be a drawing near to God, from whom we have been so long estranged. Thus the Prodigal arose, and went to his father. Sin separates us from God, and drives us from Him. But the true penitent feels that he needs a hiding place and a refuge. And how encouraging for him to know that his Father is ready to receive him, and to welcome him back. He comes out to meet him. His arms are open to welcome him. God's language is, 'Come now, and let us reason together — though your sins are as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool!' He has sent His Son to be our atoning sacrifice — through Him there is acceptance, and for His sake we are sure of a gracious reception. The case of the Penitent Thief is often quoted, and used as an encouragement to those who have deferred their repentance until a death-bed. But we should bear in mind that, although true repentance is never too late — a late repentance is seldom, very seldom, true. The thief's repentance was certainly a late repentance; but one can hardly suppose that it was a deferred repentance — for he had probably never seen, or even heard of the Savior, until that awful, but most blessed, meeting at the Cross.

I might describe many more characteristics of True Repentance; but I will mention only one more, and that is an earnest desire to be holy. For this, the true penitent sighs. This is what he most longs for — to be holy; not only to be forgiven — but to serve God by a holy life. Thus in Psalms 51, David not only entreats God to blot out his sins, but he further prays, 'Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me.' And now bearing these four characteristics in mind, we shall be able to ascertain, if we desire it — whether we are real penitents or not.

1. Do I feel conscious of past guilt, and of indwelling sin?
2. Is it the desire of my heart to put away sin, and never more to let it have dominion over me?
3. Have I drawn near to God, as a sinner, and found acceptance for my soul through the blood of Christ?
4. Is holiness my aim, and do I long to be conformed to His image? May God give us grace honestly to examine ourselves, and not to rest content unless we have good reason to believe that ours is an earnest and true repentance, and that God has accepted us.

We can well understand that there is a thrill of joy among the hosts of Heaven, when a penitent returns to God! For repentance is . . .

the first stepping-stone to salvation,

the first rung in the Ladder of Life,

the first tear from the eye of faith. And as the shepherd, while he rejoices greatly over the flock which is feeding securely under his daily care, feels even greater joy when one that has strayed away, and has for years perhaps been given up as lost, is found, and brought home to the fold — so there is great rejoicing in Heaven when a lost sinner is brought back. May God give us something of this joyous, thankful feeling, whenever a soul is brought to Christ; and enable us to take our humble part in leading others, either by our words or by our example, into His safe and happy fold!

03.05. The Touchstone of PRAYER

05. The Touchstone of PRAYER

What is Prayer? Is it the language of our lips? Is it the utterance of certain words upon our knees? It is this — but much more than this. For there are many who repeat words of Prayer — and yet never pray. There are many who go to church — but never draw near to God; who kneel before Him in their closets — but their hearts are far from Him. Their lips, it may be, have daily uttered a set of words — but their hearts have spoken nothing. Therefore their prayers, if such they may be called, have never entered into the ears of the Lord. If you know anything of the life of God in your soul — then you know that this is not prayer.

It was once just so with you — but God has taught you differently. There was a time, when a form of sound words, and a somewhat serious mind, was all you thought necessary. More than this you had heard of — but you never knew what it meant. At length came the light of God's Holy Spirit into your soul — and then came with it new and changed views of prayer.

Then you said within yourself, 'Hitherto, alas, I have never prayed at all! I have never understood what prayer meant. I used to think it was the bending of the knee, and the utterance of the lip — words well chosen and solemnly pronounced. But now I see my mistake. Prayer is the utterance of the heart — the speaking of the soul to God. It is a deep feeling within us of our needs, and poverty, and helplessness. It is a drawing near to God, and seeking to have our empty souls filled with His fullness.

Every person, I suppose, into whose hands this book may chance to fall, says some sort of prayer during each day. Probably every one kneels down, and offers up a prayer to God when he rises in the morning — and also when goes to bed at night. And yet, if I mistake not, you need a few kind words of advice on this subject.

Bear in mind that all God's people pray. They may be different from one another in many respects; but they all agree in this — they are a praying people. This was the description given of Saul of Tarsus, when God's grace had changed his heart, 'Behold, he is praying.' Once he was a Jew, and gloried in his opposition to Christ and His followers. But the Lord turned him from darkness unto light — and he became an altered man, and a man of prayer. But do you think had he never prayed before? Yes, he had repeated many a prayer. He had often knelt down in his own house, and in the temple, and holy words had passed through his lips. Like many other Jews, he had his regular times for prayer; and most likely he was very punctual in observing them. And yet all that time he perhaps never knew what real prayer was — he never prayed to God. And how about ourselves? This morning, for instance, when you knelt down by your bedside — did you pray? Or last Sunday, when prayer was offered in church — did you join in it heartily, earnestly, and truly; or did you sit, as if you had nothing to do with the prayers which were going up to Heaven; thinking perhaps of a thousand things, when you should have been thinking of God, and of your soul? But I will now give you a little affectionate advice about your Prayers.

FIRST, it will be well before you approach God in prayer, to stop a moment, and say to yourself, 'Now I am going to kneel down, and make my petition to the Most High God. Do I believe that He actually hears me — and that He is able and willing to grant my requests? Am I going to ask according to His will — or have I some selfish object in view? Am I really in earnest, and is my whole heart in the matter? Am I willing patiently and submissively to wait God's own time, and God's own way, for giving me, or denying me, what I am longing for?

Such thoughts as these will prepare our minds for the work of prayer, and lead us to a better and holier way of drawing near to God's throne.

SECONDLY, when you are in God's presence, endeavor to put away all worldly thoughts. Try not to think about worldly things when you are upon your knees — but fix your thoughts on God. Endeavor to realize His presence. You are speaking to an unseen God — but to One who sees you, and can hear you; to One who knows all your wants, and is able to give you all you need. And whatever you most need, whether it is pardon for your sins, or grace to help you in serving Him, or guidance in all your difficulties — tell it out to God, and He will relieve you.

THIRDLY, remember when you pray, that you are speaking to a heavenly Friend, to your Father. It will help you greatly to feel that you are not addressing a stranger or one at a great distance from you, but One very near you — your Father! Try it — and may God look upon you as His dear child, and give you a Father's blessing!

FOURTHLY, pray often. Besides the regular times of morning and evening, we should get into the habit of speaking to God at other times also. Often during the day lift up your heart to God, and tell Him of your needs — and especially in any time of trouble or difficulty.

Suppose you were walking along a difficult road, and there was someone with you who knew the way very well, and had much more strength than yourself — would you not be constantly speaking to this friend? And when you were a little doubtful about the next step — would you not ask him to guide you? Or, if you grew tired — would you not gladly take his hand, and trust to his support? Do so with God. He is ever by your side. Ask Him to help you, to guard you, and to strengthen you. Do not attempt to walk alone — but lean on this Almighty Friend.

FIFTHLY, as to the words you should use. You are perhaps ready to ask: Is it best to pray in my own words, or to use a prayer which I have learned? It does not, I think, matter which — just so that we pray with our whole hearts. What I would recommend is sometimes to use a Form of Prayer; and then at other times to address God in your own words — and though they may be poor and simple words, He will accept them.

There is one more important direction which I must give you. When you pray, always offer up your petitions in the Saviors name. Yes, you will say, I always do so. I always end my prayers with some such words as these, 'For the sake of Jesus Christ,' 'through the merits and mediation of Christ our Lord.' Is this a mere form? No — it is because we dare not come to God in our own name, for we are unworthy to do so — and therefore we come in the Savior's name. And does He not encourage us by saying, 'Whatever you shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it to you.'

There is still one more direction which I ought to give you. There is something of great importance which should accompany our supplications; and that is, Thanksgiving. 'In all things (says the

Apostle) by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.' 'Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks — for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.' He requires of us a thankful acknowledgment of what we have received, before He gives fresh mercies. It is the grateful heart which He loves to bless. But do you not often find yourself far readier to plead with God for the removal of any trial — than to praise God when that trial is removed? In a storm at sea the most careless are brought on their knees — but when the tempest is over, from how few is the voice of praise heard! And yet thanksgiving is the Christian's sweetest occupation — it savors most of Heaven.

There are two INQUIRIES which it may be well to answer. One is this: Is it right for a Christian to bring his little personal needs before God — matters which concern his everyday life? And further, is it permitted to bring those matters which are of a purely temporal nature before God?

Yes, I think we may; for by so doing we give a religious aspect to all our concerns, temporal as well as spiritual; those which are connected with this world — as well as those which have a direct bearing upon eternity. For if we look into the Word of God we find no limitation whatever. 'In everything let your requests be made known unto God.' In such cases we should be careful to ask God to give, provided it be according to His will. The other question connected with this subject is, How does God usually grant our petitions? Does He so palpably, and unmistakably, and immediately answer our requests — that we see at once that our prayer is heard? If we ask for guidance — does He forthwith clearly open our way? Or if we ask for strength — do we instantly feel a fresh power within us?

No, it is only when we get into the habit of constantly committing ourselves to God — when it becomes our practice to throw ourselves on Him in good earnest — then our worrying cares leave us one by one; and God meets us with a constant outpour of blessing. It is when a person thus lives a life of prayer, constantly committing himself and his concerns to the Lord — that those words of John are fulfilled: 'This is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us — and if we know that he hears us whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we desired of him.' My dear reader, may God pour out upon you the spirit of Prayer — and may He show you the sweetness and comfort of Prayer!

03.06. The Touchstone of UNWORLDLINESS

06. The Touchstone of UNWORLDLINESS

There are certain ideas sometimes expressed regarding the world, which are unsound and unreal, and therefore require a little adjusting. Let us apply the Touchstone, and endeavor to get at the truth.

Now, this world of ours is the place which God has chosen for our present abode. It is His world — it is full of His works — and there is much in it that is very lovely. Ought we not then, in a certain measure, to regard it with favor? Surely it was never intended that we should look upon it with dislike and scorn, speaking of it with a sweeping condemnation — our God never meant that we should. What He did mean was that we should not love what is sinful in the world. We should not be tied down to its wicked customs, or follow its evil practices, or be drawn away by its follies. Therefore He cautions us not to love the world (1 John 2:15). But this is not all. He means more than this — that we must not be so taken up even by what is harmless in the world, as to love it to excess. For truly there is much in the world which, though not actually hurtful, may become hurtful to us — much that may steal away the heart, and shut out the love of God.

Take, for instance, our Daily Occupations. It is quite right that we should attend to them. The Christian may serve God without neglecting his worldly calling. Nay, it is a part of his duty to glorify God by an active, zealous attention to that work which has been given him to do, and to do it in a Christian manner. Paul bids us to be 'fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,' and yet at the same time not to be 'slothful in business.' We learn too from the Gospels, that when John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness, and crowds came to listen to his teaching — some Publicans or Tax gatherers stepped forward, and said, 'Master, what shall we do?' And what was his answer? Did He say to them, 'You must leave your employment, if you would be real Christians?' No, He told them to follow it, but with greater honesty and integrity. 'Collect no more taxes than the government requires.' Their former sin had consisted in doing their worldly duties in a wicked way — their future religiousness was to consist in doing those duties in a holy way.

Next came some Soldiers. 'Master, what shall we do?' He does not say, 'You must put down your sword, and serve your country no more.' But he tells them to be more considerate, and less hasty, in the discharge of their duty: 'Do not extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay.' But the danger is, when we allow our worldly occupations to take up too much of our attention — when we set our hearts upon them, and allow them that place in our affections which ought to be given to God — when they are permitted to come first in our daily thoughts and desires, and to stand uppermost and foremost in our minds — when, in fact, the heart, which was made large enough for God, is allowed to waste itself upon the world.

Neither, again, is it the will of God that we should be debarred from loving our fellow-men who are in the world, as if He were jealous of our love being given to them; and as if we should be inclined to love Him the more for loving them the less. Surely He would have us love our Parents, our

Brothers, our Sisters, our Friends — with all the intensity of the heart's affections. This certainly was not John's forbidden world.

Next, I must say a word or two about the PLEASURES and AMUSEMENTS of the world.

Now, God never meant His people to hang down their heads, and go mourning all the day. He loves to see us cheerful and happy. There is an innocent mirth, which it is quite lawful for us to indulge in. But there are some amusements in the world which are actually sinful in themselves — or lead to sin and forgetfulness of God; and there are others too, which become sinful when they are followed with undue eagerness. For instance, it is quite lawful for us to have Friends, and to love them, and to feel a happiness in being with them. But when we cannot do without their society, when we find it irksome to be alone, when we grow fond of being always in company — then our very friends and companions become a snare to us, and we try, by going into the world, to forget ourselves, and to escape from those thoughts which may be pressing us too closely.

I confess that I tremble for the amount of worldliness which prevails in some professing Christian families. There is a great danger, lest pleasure and excitement should be regarded as the one object to be sought after — lest Jesus should be robbed of His true allegiance — and hearts, born for higher and better things, should be drawn down to earth, and riveted there by a chain not easily broken.

Oh, how soon — how fatally soon — we pass, imperceptibly perhaps, from things lawful to those which are doubtful — and then a step further, to those which are positively sinful! How soon does the heart, in which there was once a spark of the love of Christ — become chilled and warped by its contact with the world! How soon does the reading of light and frivolous books take the place of that precious Word, which is truth itself! And how soon is communion with God, exchanged for fellowship with the world!

I do indeed tremble for those who are dreaming away the best portion of their lives, who are spending them in vanity and emptiness, and will one day wake up with the miserable feeling that they have lived to no real purpose! Did our Lord live thus, when here on earth? Did the early Christians live thus? Can you suppose for a moment that this was the life that Peter led, or Mary of Bethany, or Aquila and Priscilla, or John? Then we cannot live thus. No, unless we are willing to give up the Savior, whom we have pledged ourselves to follow, and the glorious inheritance we profess to be living for. The question is: Are we candidates for everlasting happiness? If we are, then we must live, not for this world, but for another. Our hearts and our treasure must be there. But there is a danger into which some fall. There are some people who imagine that they are giving up the world, when, in fact, they are merely transferring their attachment from one class of worldliness to fix it upon another. Parties and theaters are perhaps put aside — when other amusements of a kindred nature, and scarcely less attractive, are indulged in. This however is not self-denial — it is still enjoying the world, though in another shape — it is turning aside from one kind of self-pleasing, that we may indulge in another.

It is a great thing to be honest with ourselves; for God is not mocked. If you really desire to follow Jesus and to renounce the world, you must mortify your earthly affections — and raise them by private prayer, and by other direct acts of faith, to things above. In the sense then that I have mentioned, we are clearly told not to love the World. But for what reason is this warning given us?

Why is this world of ours unworthy of our love?

First, because its spirit is directly in variance with God. 'Don't you know (says the Apostle) that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore will be the friend of the world, is the enemy of God.' James 4:4

What do we find, if we mix much among worldly people? Do we not find that God is put aside? He is thrust out of His proper place. People seem to make a sort of agreement that He shall for a time be forgotten. But how sad to think that our best and truest Friend — that Friend whose presence and support we shall one day so much need — that this dear Friend should ever be forcibly excluded from our hearts, and the world with all its trifles let in! And yet so it is with the ordinary run of men.

Ought we not then, as followers of Christ, to stand aside from a thoughtless, trifling world? Is not the beaten path sometimes an unsafe path? Is not the stream that flows the smoothest sometimes nearest to the precipice? Take care lest you are gliding down the stream of this world — lest you are walking in the road which hundreds walk in, and then suddenly find out that it is the way of eternal destruction!

Another reason why we should not love the world, is because its joys are at best unsatisfying. They are like alcohol to a thirsty man, which only make him thirst the more. They will never satisfy his desire, but only feed it. The worldly man, whether he is seeking after earthly pleasures, or earthly gains — is ever seeing a paradise in the distance; but the nearer he approaches it, the more sure it is to vanish, like an optical illusion, from his sight. It is thought of in his midnight dreams, and in his waking hours; but it is very seldom realized.

How different are those things which come from God! There is a substance and reality in them, which cannot be mistaken.

There is another reason why you should not love the world — and that is because it is only temporary — its joys and gains are merely for a time. There is a shifting, fleeting, fading character about them. If only the greatness and blessedness of the eternal world be a real thing with you, then you will at once see how poor this world is in comparison. This world is but a Tent, spread out for our present abode — Heaven is a building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. This world is but a passing shadow — Heaven an enduring substance. This world a pilgrimage — Heaven is a home. This world is a desert — Heaven a paradise. This world is a strange land — Heaven is the place of our citizenship. This world abounds with storms — Heaven is a universal calm. This world is full of changes — in Heaven our lot will be forever fixed. This world is the abode of sin, and shame, and sorrow — Heaven is a scene of holiness, of glory, and of God.

Then ought we not to look upwards? Ought we not to set our affection on things above? We have a great work, and a perilous journey before us. Take care that you do not loiter along the way. Hasten on. Let your motto be, 'I press toward the mark!'

It is a great mistake to suppose that we must go out of the world for safety. There is no need for us to hide ourselves in some nook and corner to escape its dangers. We are to do as much good as we can while we are here — to put our talents to the very best account, and to show plainly that,

although in the world, we are not of the world — but that we have our eyes fixed on a better country, even a heavenly one!

It is not, I know, easy to take a decided and unworldly course. It will cost you much. Your conduct will be carped at, and counted folly. Yes, the stream is strong — and you must stem it. The way is steep and narrow — we do not deny it. But then how blessed to be following Christ! How safe are those who are walking closely by His side! But this difficulty often presents itself. Sometimes we scarcely know how to act for the best. 'Shall I be right in doing this or that thing — or going to this or that place?' This is a question which often comes before us — and it is very perplexing to a really earnest mind. Let me try and help you by giving you two directions, which you may always have before you.

One is — Be very careful never to put yourself in the way of the world's temptation. If, against your will, you are thrown into circumstance of temptation — then in that case God is ready to give you grace to come out unharmed. But never thrust yourself into such an evil path. For if you do this, and then expect God to keep you — then you will be mistaken.

Let us take an instance. A job may be offered to you — a job of worldly advantage — but one in which it would be difficult to serve God faithfully. Now, in such a case, to accept it would be to put yourself in the way of temptation — and therefore to debar yourself from God's protection, and to risk the safety of your soul. Whereas boldly to refuse it would be your duty, and in the end your happiness. Or you may have entered upon some occupation or amusement, which you may after a while discover to be gradually deadening your heart, and unfitting you for the inner work of heart-devotion. Then, as you value your soul, at once turn from it, and give it up. Better to displease some, and to lose face with others — better to be despised for Christ's sake — than to forfeit the favor of God, and to miss the heavenly prize!

Again, when you find the world creeping in, at once check yourself, and be upon your guard. Even Christian people, who in many respects have given up the world, who flatter themselves that they have altogether put it aside, and are beyond its reach — may still have very worldly thoughts and feelings. Oh, remember, the world may be in your heart — though not in your actions! You may love the world, and secretly pine after it — though you have outwardly renounced it.

I have more to say on this subject, and shall therefore speak of it in the next section, where I shall show you that there is a right way of using the world. May God help us, while in the world, to live near to Him! May He be with us in our conflicts! May He be as a Sun to cheer us, and a Shield to protect us! And may He bring us at last to that eternal rest which He has prepared for those who truly love Him, and earnestly desire to serve Him! In the last section I showed you what 'the World' is, which we are charged not to love. I pointed out to you that the Christian is bound to avoid all that is actually sinful in the world, and also that which, though innocent in itself, becomes sinful when allowed to be too engrossing. He must not love it — and indeed, if the love of the Father is in him, he will not and cannot love it. But there is a right way of treating the world, and there is a blessing to be obtained from it. It is not to be scorned and trampled upon — as if it were all evil; nor to be rejected, as altogether worthless. Paul tells us very differently — he speaks of 'using this world, as not abusing it.'

It has been said that 'the element of Fire is a gift of Heaven, when we use it for the purpose of light and warmth — but it becomes a flake of Hell when we let it loose over the sleeping city, or the fruitful plains. Even so the world is a blessed angel to us — if we make it our servant; but it is a malignant demon to us — if it becomes our master.'

Let us see then how we can use the world to our profit.

First, I would say, by endeavoring to fill rightly our several relationships in life. There was a time when our Lord put this test before His followers, 'Are you willing to leave father and mother, husband, wife, children, lands, and possessions, for My sake?' Thank God, He does not put us under this searching requirement now — though, if He did, I hope that some would be found, who could yield up all that is most dear to them — could empty their hearts of all their deepest affection — and in answer to the question, 'Do you love Me more than these?' could say, 'Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you!' 'There is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with you.'

But, I say, our Lord in His tender mercy does not require this of us now. He allows us to love — yes, and with intense affection — those whom He has given to us, so long as they do not usurp His supreme place in our hearts. These are not what we are cautioned not to love. This is not the forbidden world. But how are we to fill our relationships in the world? Are you a Parent? Let the very image of your heavenly Father be reflected in your conduct. Bring up your children for Him. Let your love towards them be the counterpart of His love towards you. Are you a Son or a Daughter? Let a spirit of dutiful obedience mark your actions. Let your great aim be to honor, to please, and to comfort your parents. Are you in a high position? Be not over-anxious to have the preeminence among your fellow-men — to display your talents, or your wealth, so as to attract their admiration. But rather strive to use your influence for good — and remember that your position is like that of 'a city which cannot be hidden.' Or are you occupying a humbler place in the world? Then, you also have a certain amount of influence, which you may exercise for Christ. You too may shine in that special walk of life which has been chosen for you.

You should use this world then, and that particular position in it which God has caused you to fill, for Him. And then, whether rich or poor, great or lowly — you will spread a blessing around you, and leave a Christian mark behind you. In our worldly employments too, we should endeavor to serve God. Whether we be ministers, or merchants, or tradesmen, or laborers — whatever our calling may be — we should let our Christianity be apparent in that calling. We should take our stand as servants of God. Ours should be not a mere worldly standard, but a Christian standard. Unswerving truthfulness, an honesty that will face the light, a rectitude which cannot be impeached, a high tone bearing the gospel impress — these should characterize all our dealings in the world. All such done as in God's sight, and with our eye ever looking for His approval, will doubtless be acceptable to Him.

Instead of regarding the hours employed in our trade, or our profession, as so much time taken away from the religious life — we should rather look upon it as the appointed sphere in which that life may display itself. When the man, from whom the Legion had been expelled, asked Jesus to allow him to continue altogether with Him — our Lord in His reply sent him back to his home and his calling; showing that in the right discharge of his worldly duties he would best glorify God. So you see that the following of a trade or profession is not only consistent with true religion — but it is often the chief sphere in which our religion shows itself.

Further, whatever we possess in this world — we should use it for God's glory. Our TIME should be employed for Him, not expended upon ourselves, not wasted or frittered away in useless pursuits — but employed for God. Our FOOD is not given us to pamper our appetites, but to strengthen us. We must not, as some do — live to eat and drink, but eat and drink to live. The Apostle bids us, 'Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do — to do all to the glory of God.' Our MONEY too should be carefully expended. It may otherwise be a great snare to us, dragging us down to ruin by slow degrees. For we are told that 'the love of money is the root of all evil!' And are we not warned that it is hard for a rich man — yes, impossible for one who trusts in riches — to enter the kingdom of Heaven? But if our money be used in a Christian way — what an important means of usefulness it may prove! How much good we may do with it! How greatly we may forward the work of God! How we may encourage those who are laying themselves out for Christ and His service! There are around us works going on — distinctly Christian works — which by our apathy we may positively check — but by our hearty interest, by our energy, and by our contributions, we may effectually promote.

Once more, we should use this world as a mere dwelling-place, and not as our home. There are some who so love the world, that they have no wish to exchange it for Heaven. They have made their nest here, and have no desire to leave it. Others again cling to life, not because it is dear to them; but because the future is dark, and they fear to enter it. Thus we see them clinging to the world, though it has been anything but a joyous world to them. Yes, and clinging to it more tenaciously as years go on; for the tree has struck its roots so deep in the ground, that it is hard to root it up. But thank God, there are others, who though they are happy enough here, are ever in a state of readiness to fly away and be at rest — to depart and be with Christ, which is far better! This world is to them only as an inn, in which they are sojourners for a while — but their home is above. This world is a strange land, through which they are passing, on their way to the 'better country.' And now, I have two things more to say on this subject. I have a word of caution, to put you on your guard; and also a word of encouragement, to help you. My CAUTION is this — Do not attempt what hundreds attempt — do not endeavor to accomplish what cannot be accomplished — namely, to make room in your heart for the love of the world, and also the love of the Jesus. They cannot exist together. You cannot serve both God and Mammon.

There are numbers trying to mix up the two. But what is the consequence in such cases? If we could look into these hearts, especially if they have experienced something of the power of grace within — we would find the religious life flagging; its beauty and its brilliancy paling away; the warmth of its love chilled, as it passes through the cold atmosphere of the world, having lost as it were, all its power!

No, we cannot serve two masters! We cannot drink the cup of the Lord — and yet quaff the sweet but poisonous cup of the world! One or other must be put aside — one or other must gain the day.

Choose then between the two. Draw for yourself a broad line of demarcation. Draw it boldly, meekly, prayerfully, thoughtfully — and, having drawn it, never overstep it. Harken to the call of Him who is your truest Friend, 'Come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.' And now for a word of ENCOURAGEMENT. We ask you to give up the world. This is no small demand — it will cost you much to give it up. But then we offer you more than an

equivalent. And surely, since the heart is capable of loving God Himself, it is sad, very sad, to see it wasting itself on a cold, narrow, and unsatisfying world. When we tell you then not to love the world — we also tell you of something better which you may love. We would not wish to drive the world out of your heart — and then leave it empty. It must love something. You cannot give a pent-up stream its choice of drying up or flowing on. It must, after a while, rush on either in a right or wrong channel. Direct it rightly, and it will flow joyously through the meadows, fertilizing them in its onward course. But attempt to block up its passage — and it will soon force its way, a thing of madness and of ruin. Stop it you cannot — it must flow in one direction or another. So it is with the heart. Let it not take its own course, unfettered and free — for then we shall have the riot of worldliness. But let us ask God to bring us under the gentle bondage of His grace. Ask Him to drive out the world — and to fill the empty void with His own presence. Ask Him to shed abroad His own love in your heart. This will satisfy all your craving. To love God — to have our hearts filled with His love — this is our highest happiness! Then shall we have no need to go hither and thither with our broken cisterns — but there will be within us 'a well of water springing up unto everlasting life!'

03.07. The Touchstone of TRUTH

07. The Touchstone of TRUTH At different periods in the world's history there have been attempts made by one and another to ascertain what is the truth as regards man's eternal destiny. There has been an anxious yearning in many minds to have such questions as these answered:

What is truth?

How can I grasp it? Where is the casket that contains it?

How is it to be found?

Thank God, we Christians need not make these vague inquiries. God's truth has once and forever been revealed to us. He, who 'at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in times past unto the fathers — has in these last days spoken by His Son!' Christ has come to this dark and erring world of ours, declaring 'I am the truth!' He is the very embodiment of truth — the great Torchbearer to us on our midnight journey — the Light of the world. No doubt there are many things which we shall never know — many things too which we long to know, but our inquiries will never be satisfied. Many matters of science, for instance — many hidden, locked-up mysteries, to which we would gladly find the key. And in such cases all we can do is to make our guesses. A discovery is made today — and an opposite discovery tomorrow — and yet even these may be questioned! So that there is much that, after all, remains behind, still held back from us. We cannot reach it. There are some paths which we can never enter, and some limits which are impassable — they baffle us, and turn us back. But happily it is not so with those higher truths which concern our salvation. God has in His mercy revealed them to us. He has given us His Holy Spirit to 'guide us into all truth.' 'the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.' There is not an earnest inquirer, asking his way to Zion, with his face thitherward — who need fail to discover it. There is not a real seeker who will be disappointed: 'He who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds.'

If we desire to serve God and live near to Him — the path is clearly marked out for us. We have our plain directory. If we have grown tired of sin, and long to be forgiven — the one remedy is declared — not many remedies, from which we may select the best, but the one heaven-devised remedy. And if to that great and all-important question, 'What must I do to be saved?' an answer is sought, that answer is given to us with the utmost plainness: 'As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so shall the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life!'

There are certain other great and leading truths, which every thoughtful one among us feels to be of vast importance to his soul's comfort and his soul's safety. And on these points our souls can find no rest unless they are cleared — but it is on these points happily that God's revelation is plain. There may be a dimness about other matters — but here the light shines with unmistakable clearness. And yet the truth does not force itself upon us. It is not equally clear to every mind. We are in the position of men with defective sight. The road is plain, so that wayfaring men, though fools, may walk therein. The path is distinctly marked out. There is light — but it may be we have

not eyes to see it. We grope as in the dark — and so miss the way.

What we need, all of us, in order to understand heavenly things, is the enlightening grace of God. He who at the first commanded the light to shine out of darkness — must shine into our hearts, 'to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' There must be a direct revelation of God to our individual souls. He must shine, not only upon the page of Scripture — but in our hearts. Christ must manifest Himself unto us, as He does not unto the world. He must bring home His own truth to us. This is what we all need — ministers and people, learned and unlearned. We must submit ourselves to God's teaching, and learn from Him. But do we not find that, although there is a promise from our Lord that 'the Holy Spirit shall teach us all things' — that Christians differ about the truth of God, even the most earnest and devout men? The fact is, that the Holy Spirit is able, and also ready, to guide each inquirer. But He has to deal with very imperfect minds, and with very slow learners — so that the failing is on our part, not on His. Yes, so it is. And as the mariner may err, with the compass in his very hand, from not reading its bearings rightly — so the Christian will often err, mistaking the impulse of his own mind, or the emotion of his own heart, or the dictate of his own conscience — for the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit. And here inferior helps come to our aid. We take the Bible into our hands, knowing that it was given by inspiration of God, and that in it the Holy Spirit speaks to us. But we need further assistance to enable us to understand it rightly. The holiest man, the man of prayer, even he who is full of the Holy Spirit — needs to confer and take counsel with his brethren. He needs to be instructed, informed, and helped. It is clearly intended that it should be so. Thus Saul, when converted, received instruction from Ananias; Apollos from Priscilla and Aquila; and the Eunuch from Philip. And if we are wise, we shall thus profit by the help of others. God has not left us to ourselves, to grope our way as best we can through this difficult and dangerous world. He has given us the teaching and the teachers that we need. He has banded us together, and made us helpers one of another. He makes us feel that we are brethren, united by the holiest bonds of common truth and of brotherly love. And here it may be asked, 'In what respect may the Church be regarded as our teacher?' We often hear of 'the teaching of the Church.' And it is well clearly to understand whether she may be looked upon as our teacher; and if so, in what respect she teaches. Most assuredly every Church claims to be the teacher of her children — and ours undoubtedly does so. The Church is spoken of in Scripture as 'the pillar and ground of the truth.' But she does not lord it over us, bidding us to receive her own particular doctrines with blind submission — as if she had a right of her own to frame them. She does not act as a stern mistress, forcing us to bend our will to hers, and our views to those which she at any time may lay down. But as a loving parent she takes us by the hand, guiding, molding, regulating, and balancing our judgments; whispering to us in loving accents, 'This is the way — walk in it;' ever reminding us that there is but one well-spring of truth, the Word of God — and that whatever is derived from other sources is worthless and unreal.

One word then of advice. Prize the truth — God's truth, the truth which He has in mercy revealed to us. Be thankful that you belong to a Church which holds that truth definitely, firmly, and lovingly — a Church whose principles are not swayed by the ever-varying circumstances of time and place, but are fixed and unalterable. But at the same time, be not satisfied with a mere reception of the doctrines which the Bible reveals to us, and which the Church has embodied in her formularies. Do not be satisfied with being a sound Churchman — sound as regards the truth

which you profess to hold. Do not until you have received those truths into your heart — and, above all, until you have received Christ and His atonement as the great central truth which gives life to the soul. Doctrines, however clearly rooted in the mind, cannot save you — but Christ can. The one is only a skeleton — the other is the substance. One is only a code of words — the other is a living Person — the Friend of your soul. It is not enough to know that the sun is shining, we should receive its warmth into our bosoms. In these days, when knowledge runs to and fro, bear in mind that the best, the truest, the highest knowledge — is to know God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. Pray that you may know Him as your daily, hourly Companion, the Sun of your system, the Polestar as you steer your way towards the wished-for haven. And when you sometimes think of all the doubts and controversies that are going on around us, you will do well to fall back upon the pure and simple truths of Scripture. It will be like turning from the flickering and dancing of a meteor — to the fixed stars that shine forever, and are of a brightness that never fails. And what is of more consequence, in that day when you are called to part with life, when all else seems to be worthless and uncertain — oh, then grasp firmly the precious truth of God. Let that be the anchor of your soul, both sure and steadfast. Rest your feet securely on that solid rock, remembering that Christ and His Word are unchangeable.

What I desire for you, dear reader, and for myself — is that we may thankfully receive the truth, being taught by the Lord Himself. That we may love the truth and walk in the truth — until we reach that world where there will be no error, but all will be as the glow of the midday sun — where all will be light and love!

03.08. The Touchstone of Christian STRENGTH

08. The Touchstone of Christian STRENGTH

I am afraid it must be acknowledged that there is a laxity and weakness in the Christianity of the present day. There is not that boldness, and strength, and vigor, which marked the religious life of the early followers of our Lord. Our present stature is a low one — and we do not come up to the height of those who served Christ formerly.

One cause of this is, that there is very little opposition now to the service of Christ; and where there is no opposition — there is generally a lack of growth. In the days of the Apostles anyone who came out from the world, and declared himself for Christ, was sure to meet with persecution. He must deny himself, and take up his cross — if he would be His disciple; and to do this, much courage and determination were needed. Whereas in the present day, and in this country, an outward profession of religion is expected of us as a matter of course — and a certain amount of inward religious feeling passes unobserved.

Here then is, I think, a reason why there is so large a class of half-hearted and half-devoted followers of Christ among us. The Apostles as with one voice urge us to buckle on our armor, and to put forth all our strength. They seem to say, 'You are in the midst of foes — you have a great battle to fight, and a glorious victory to win. You have need of courage to make a bold stand, and of strength to overcome your spiritual enemies. Act courageous like men — be strong! But Christians of the present day are not, I fear, what our Lord would have us to be. When we look around us, in our towns, and villages, and homes, what do we see? Plenty of eagerness and activity, of zeal and earnestness — about worldly things. But as regards those higher things which are eternal, and which concern us far the most — there is a deadness and coldness, a shrinking back and timidity, which are very sad to think of. Many are afraid to take up the cross — they dread its weight. They are ashamed to confess Christ — it would cost them too much. Here and there are a few bolder ones — a few who dare to range themselves on the Lord's side. But they are the exception. And yet, what would you think of a soldier, who entered the army, but would have nothing to do with the active work belonging to his profession, who neglected the hours of drill, and when called upon to advance and fight, shrank back into the rear?

What would you think of a servant, who engaged himself to a master — but looked after his own gains and his own interest instead? And are not we all Christ's soldiers and servants by profession? Have we not once for all joined the ranks of Christ, and given a solemn vow that we will be His? Then, ought we not to be real Christians? Jesus says to us, 'He who is not with me is against me.' Oh, shame upon us, that we should clothe ourselves in His regimentals, and wear His livery — and yet be on the side of His enemies! That we should be numbered among His servants — and yet shrink from confessing Him before men! Manly courage and determination are needed — for a coward cannot follow Christ. But, alas! Many of us lack the courage that is needed. We are afraid . . .

to take the bold step,
to declare ourselves for Jesus,
to leave the world,
to follow Jesus,
to shake off the defilements of sin,
and to serve a holy God.

Now, it is well to find out our fault, and to own ourselves wrong. This is a step gained. But do not let us stop there. We should go much further. If we feel that we have been lacking in courage, and that ours has been but a feeble course — oh, let us wake up, and put on Christ's strength. Let us make a great effort at once to live . . .

a more decidedly Christian life,
a more earnest life,
a more watchful and consistent life,
a higher spiritual life.

I say — live a more decidedly Christian life! The world is unchristian — therefore be not of the world, though living in it. "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty!" 2 Corinthians 6:16-18 To a certain extent, we are forced to do as others do. But the moment we find anything drawing us away from God — anything which seems to run counter to His word and will — we should make a stand, and keep ourselves in the strait and narrow path marked out for us. We must dare to take a Christian course, though it is different from the customs, and practice, and ways of the world around us — for there are times when we must be singular, and not follow the multitude to do evil!

I do feel that what we need is to live . . .

a more decidedly Christian life,
a more unworldly life,
a life nearer to God,
a Heavenly life,
walking now by faith, and not by sight,

looking not at the things which are seen and are temporal — but at those things which are unseen and are eternal, declaring plainly that we seek a better country, even a Heavenly one!

Let us try also to live a more earnest life. We are, I trust, warm in our friendships, warm in our family affections, warm in our loyalty to our Queen and Country. But is this all that is required of us? Can it be right to be earnest and devoted towards a brother, or a friend, or towards our king —

but cold towards God? And yet it seems as if we were afraid, lest we should give to God too much of our love, when we know that He deserves it all — a thousand times more than we can give Him! I would say to each one of you — to you who have never thought on the subject — and to you also who have now and then felt a little moving of the heart towards better things, but are still wavering and undecided — yes, and to you also who have given your allegiance to Christ — be bold, be zealous, be thorough. May the Lord give you not only grace to obey Him — but a burning zeal in His cause; not only a wish to be His — but a holy love for Him, and a desire to serve Him with an undivided heart! May He breathe new life into your souls, and inspire you with a spirit of earnestness and of power!

Those people who sometimes earnestly serve Christ — and at other times coldly turn away from Him; who are in earnest on Sundays — but lukewarm in the week; who are fervent perhaps in their talk — but slow in doing anything for their Lord; who are regular in going to church — but neglectful of private prayer and Bible reading; who are bold in conversation with church people — but keeping a cowardly silence before the careless and worldly. Such people are not real Christians — and theirs is but a poor, shallow kind of religion, unworthy of those who would be followers of Christ.

Further, let us endeavor to live a watchful and consistent life. Let us never forget — whether we are in our own quiet parishes, where everyone knows us; or away from home, where those whom we meet are almost strangers to us — let us never forget that we are the professed followers of Christ, and that (wherever we may be) He marks every step we take, and every word we speak. If we would have God's presence with us, and the comfort of His blessing, we should be ever trying to serve Him consistently. Be very careful with regard to the companions you meet. Avoid those who speak irreverently of Him on whom all our hopes rely. Be very careful as to the books you read, and as to the words you utter.

It is no easy matter . . .

to act rightly and consistently,

to keep the torch alight amidst the rough and stormy atmosphere of the world,

to preserve an even track amidst the many windings of your daily course.

It will require your whole strength, and the constant help of God's grace, to enable you to be faithful. 'What then I say unto you, I say unto all: Watch!'

Lastly, endeavor to lead a higher life — not only higher, as compared with the worldly life of those around you — not higher merely, as compared with the life which you once lived — but higher, as being more like the life described to us in the Word of God, or the life of Jesus — who was holy, harmless, and undefiled, who lived for us a pure and pattern life. By a 'higher life,' I mean a more spiritual life, a more unworldly life, a life of faith, a closer walk with God. We need not go out of the world to lead such a life. We may live it in our homes; we may live it amidst our daily occupations. God has called us to such a life, and He will give us grace to live watchfully and prayerfully in the world; yes, and usefully too, a blessing to others, while we enjoy peace in our own souls. Oh that we could say — alas, how few can say: 'To me, to live is Christ!' 'The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God!' But you will perhaps complain of the difficulty of such a

life, and of its almost impossibility in your particular position. No, it is not impossible — though I well know its difficulty. 'Good thoughts (you will say) now and then come over me — but then comes a strong wave of worldliness, and sweeps them all away. I am powerless. The road is too narrow for me to walk in, the mountain too high for me to climb.' And yet, what is the Apostle's language in Ephesians 6? Does he not say, 'Be strong?' Is he trifling with us when he says this? Can he be aware of our weakness? Yes — but he adds three little words which are full of meaning. He knows of a secret, which he gladly divulges. He speaks of a hidden strength, an unseen strength, all ready to be given us. 'Be strong (he says) in the Lord.' Our strength is not in ourselves — it comes from above.

How was it that the early followers of Christ were so devoted, and did such great things for God, enduring trials, and even martyrdom, rather than deny Him? Many of them were weak in body, and were among the insignificant of the earth. But they were 'strong' in the highest sense. And we should be strong for Christ. We should be daring enough to stand up for our Lord, in the midst of those who love Him not — we should be firm, and take the right side, never holding back for fear of others, or lest we should forfeit their good opinion.

Oh pray for heavenly strength to be given you. Draw near to God, and entreat His blessing. To serve the Lord faithfully will require a daily effort. But do not be discouraged. He will give you all the help you need, if you apply to Him. And ever bear in mind that saying of the Apostle, 'When I am weak, then am I strong' — weak in myself, but 'strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might!'

03.09. The Touchstone of Christian ACTIVITY and REPOSE

09. The Touchstone of Christian ACTIVITY and REPOSE

Activity and earnestness should certainly be a prevailing feature in the Christian character. He should be ever working for the great Master whom he serves. He should be intent on the occupation which he has in hand, doing it for the Lord, and not for man. Paul exhorts us: 'Never be lacking in zeal — but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.' And yet, at the same time, there is a calm, peaceful repose, which should also adorn our character. May we not say, then, that there is a time for patient quietness — and there is also a time for activity and effort; a time to be up and doing — and a time to bear, to suffer, to be still? For is it not in the pure, peaceful, and unruffled water that the heavens reflect most clearly their beauty?

Let us begin by inquiring WHEN it is that this stillness and quietness befits us.

First, when God lifts up His arm to afflict us. It is of little use at such times to struggle against His almighty power — to be restless and complaining when His heavy hand is laid upon us. Our wisdom is . . .

to bear the burden which oppresses us with patience,

to submit cheerfully to the will of God, and

to kiss the painful rod which scourges us.

We should remember that our Father does not afflict His children willingly, that is, for His own pleasure — but for their profit. He loves them; and when He punishes them, it is for their discipline, and to make them what He would have them to be — partakers of His holiness.

We should look at our afflictions in this light — and not let a murmur escape our lips. Our language should be, 'It is the Lord — let Him do what seems good to Him!' So also when we meet with ill-treatment from our fellow-men, it is well to exercise the same quiet spirit of endurance. Our Lord bids us, when smitten on one cheek — to turn to the smiter the other also. We should be ready to do so. This is the spirit in which the Christian should act — not rendering evil for evil, and violence for violence; 'Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing.' Of course there are occasions when it is lawful, and expedient too, to punish the offender. And there are other times, when forbearance degenerates into cowardice, and when our quiet acceptance of injuries would only encourage the oppressor. But in most cases it is both our wisdom and our duty to exercise that Christian charity 'which bears all things,' and 'which suffers long, and is kind.' For this we have our Lord's example, Who said of His persecutors, 'Father, forgive them!' And the conduct of the Apostles, when they departed from the council, 'Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name,' shows that they had indeed 'the mind which was in Christ, their Master.'

I will mention another case in which to be still is the Christian's duty; namely, when danger seems to be near, and nothing but God's interposition can deliver us. On such occasions it is well to 'trust,

and not be afraid, 'to look up with quiet confidence that God will, if He sees fit, protect us, and to be willing to place ourselves unreservedly under His sheltering care. But more especially should this be the case, when we are clearly in the path of duty, and have some Scriptural authority for believing that God will come to our aid. We sometimes, in our folly, run here and there for help — but we do not obtain it; we lean upon an arm of flesh — but we find no support. It was so with the unbelieving Jews. They were constantly looking to the Egyptians in the hour of their distress. The Prophet Isaiah speaks of this folly: "Woe to the obstinate children," declares the LORD, "to those who carry out plans that are not mine — forming an alliance, but not by my Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; who go down to Egypt without consulting me; who look for help to Pharaoh's protection, to Egypt's shade for refuge. But Pharaoh's protection will be to your shame, Egypt's shade will bring you disgrace. Therefore have I cried concerning this: Their strength is to sit still."

They would have been much stronger, their minds would have been more undisturbed, they would have honored God more — if they had simply trusted in His promise, and stayed themselves upon Him. And it is often our duty, in the hour of trial or of difficulty, to be still, to lie passive in God's hands, 'to hope, and quietly to wait, for the salvation of the Lord.' And now let us take the other view. It is sometimes our wisdom, our duty, and our strength to bestir ourselves, and to summon all our energy. And if we fail in doing this, we shall be acting unworthily of our character as Christians. For instance, if there is any great and good work to be accomplished — then we sin against God by refusing to take our part. It is a sad thing to be leading a useless and inactive life — and to be a mere 'cumberer of the ground.' It is still more sad to be active in the pursuit of our own pleasures, or our own gains, and to work hard for the advancement of our own interests in the world — but to be doing nothing to advance the glory of God.

There is always some work to be done. The Christian may always find employment for God. Some work, however humble, may be accomplished in His name. There are millions of heathen in the world — we may do something for them. There are numbers of ungodly ones around our homes — we may make an effort to improve their spiritual condition, and to bring one and another to Christ. There are men laboring for the Lord both at home and abroad — can we not help them? Can we not bind up some broken heart, heal some wound, or save some soul? We may fail, it is true — but still God will own the effort. Oh then let us try. Let us be up and doing. Why do we sit still?

If the corn were ripe, it would be sinful to let it lie upon the ground, and take no steps to gather it. If numbers were dying in our streets, would not the physicians be to blame if they made no efforts to heal them? If an enemy were to invade our country, what would we think of our soldiers if they remained at ease in their barracks? And so, if there is a spiritual harvest to be gathered in, if there are souls perishing, and we have the gospel remedy in our hands — if Satan is busy among us, and we have the means of opposing him — then are we not to blame, if we do not use them? But further, does it not sometimes happen that God is dishonored, that wicked men wax bold, and speak scornfully of that Name which is above every name? We hear religion treated with contempt, and God's people ridiculed. What then? Are we to act the coward's part, and conceal our colors? Are we to pass it by in silence? If we are reproached — then it may be well to bear it; but if God is dishonored — then surely to sit still would be a disgrace to us as Christians; we would be making ourselves partakers of other men's sins.

There is one more occasion, which I must mention, when it would be a reproach to us to be inactive; namely, when a brother or sister is suffering, and we can help them. In the Parable spoken by our Lord, of the man who 'fell among thieves,' He describes the sufferer lying helpless by the roadside. And one and another sees him, but passes by with unconcern. At length a traveler comes, and not only looks upon him with a pitying eye, but does all in his power to help him in his distress. And here is a lesson for us. We should relieve the needy, comfort the sorrowful, and exercise a brother's spirit even towards a stranger. We should never remain still — if by any effort of ours we can do an act of kindness and of love.

Let us then ask God, when He would have us to 'sit still' — and when to step forward and exert ourselves. Let us be ready either to be quiet and trustful — or to be up and doing.

There are two Scripture characters that we shall do well to copy — Martha's and Mary's. For there is something to be learned from both. Martha, though she erred in being 'cumbered about much serving' — was actively engaged in caring for the Savior. She felt it to be an honor to have such a Guest under her roof; and therefore she spared no pains to bid Him welcome.

Just so, let us also spend and be spent for, Christ. Let us employ all our energy, and use every means, to advance His glory. Above all, let us take care that, not as to outward things merely, but as to our hearts within, we are ever in a state of readiness for our Lord's reception; so that when He knocks at the door we may be prepared to admit Him, and He may be willing to take up His abode within us, to sup with us, and we with Him. And let us also be like Mary, in her quiet calmness and fervent love. Her position of lowliness, and her willingness to be taught, were as welcome to Christ — yes, and more welcome — than her sister's activity in His service. Let us often 'sit still' at our Lord's feet, and there learn those blessed lessons which He alone can teach us.

03.10. The Touchstone of HUMILITY

10. The Touchstone of HUMILITY

We should bear in mind, when speaking of Humility, that there is a distinction to be made between natural and spiritual Humility — between a lowly, meek, and retiring character, which is inborn with some of us — and that which is of God's planting and nurture in a renewed heart. Certainly some are more naturally humble than others — more naturally so. Still, in all who are not under the influence of the Holy Spirit — pride rears its head in some shape or other. There will be either . . .

the pride of station,

or the pride of learning,

or pride in dress,

or, which is perhaps the worst of all, the pride of humility.

Pride even will work its way into our religion — if we are not watchful. All these are so many branches of this lofty, but corrupt, tree — so many symptoms of our defiled nature. Our First Parents fell by pride — and when the Son of God came to recover us, He did it by humbling Himself. And never was there such an instance of deep humility. 'Though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor.' 'Though He was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God,' yet for our sakes 'He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death — even the death of the cross!'

He did indeed stoop low to save us. He left Heaven with all its glories — and came into this sinful world. He laid aside for a time His majesty and greatness — and took upon Him our poor suffering nature, that He might pay with His own blood — the debt, the mighty debt, which we owed to God.

Here then is our great Pattern of humility! We, His followers, must be like Him; for does He not say to us, 'Learn of me — be humble like me — for I am meek and lowly of heart?'

Let us then now apply the Touchstone to our Humility, and put ourselves to the test.

WHAT IS GENUINE HUMILITY?

First, a humble Christian will feel that he owes everything to God's grace and love. This was Paul's feeling: 'By the grace of God, I am what I am.' 'To me, who am less than the least of all saints — is this grace given.' No one can be said to be really humble, unless he is fully persuaded that he has no merit whatever of his own. When any one feels himself to be vile and sinful, and is convinced that he deserves nothing but eternal death — then how wonderful and glorious does the love of God appear in providing salvation for him!

Now, can you feel this? Do your head and heart go along with me while I am thus speaking? Can you say, 'Thank God for having taught me this. I see it clearly. I am nothing — and infinite mercy alone can save me from what I so richly deserve!'

I am certain of this — that it is only the humble who can feel the value of a Savior, and who will cordially and thankfully accept His offers of mercy. One of the first things therefore that the gospel of Christ does for us is . . .

to humble us;

to show us what we are — and what we deserve;

to strip us of all our false coverings; and

to place Christ before us as the only refuge for penitent sinners!

Well indeed is it if your heart has been thus humbled, so that you feel inclined to lie low at the feet of Jesus, and to cling to His precious cross for safety. I need not ask whether Christ is dear to you. He must be — for now that you are enabled to lay hold of Him by faith, you would not for the whole world exchange your treasure. You may be poor — but you can hardly call it poverty if you possess Christ. You may have trials and sorrows — but how light is every one of them, now that you can feel you have a dear Friend by your side, who can turn all your sorrows into joys!

It is indeed good to have our hearts thus humbled by the Lord, that we may welcome Him as our complete and effectual Deliverer.

But, secondly, a humble Christian is one who not only considers himself to be nothing — but is willing to be thought so by others. There is a vast difference between knowing our own faults — and being willing that others should know them. It is very mortifying to be accounted nothing in the eyes of our fellow-men. Now, the really humble man is content to bear this. He has no wish to be more highly esteemed than he deserves — in fact, the flattery of his brethren is distasteful to him. And yet how utterly contrary is this to our natural feelings! The Drunkard would not wish his neighbors to know that he drinks — he would conceal it if he could. The Dishonest man would wish to appear honest before others. And why all this desire at concealment? It is because people are anxious to keep up a good image before their fellow creatures — although they may have lost it with Him who knows all. The truth is, they 'love the praise of men more than the praise of God.'

What a dangerous snare this is! To be thought well of by our brethren, and to stand high in their opinion — is too eagerly sought after by most of us. We have need not only to fight against the fear of man — but also, and still more, against the love and esteem of man. The esteem of godly men is well, as far as it goes; but it is clearly wrong to be always craving after it. We should rather feel that anything like flattering praise would be hurtful to us — and on that account we should shrink from it, and try to put it away from us.

It is hard, I know, to bring ourselves to this. To pray that we may become low in our own eyes — needs some grace. But to pray that we may be content to be lowered in the eyes of those around us — needs a large amount of grace!

Suppose you were to be informed that one, who stood high for his religious attainments, had expressed an unfavorable opinion of you — would not this be very displeasing? But I am inclined to think that a true Christian, though he would feel a little nettled at the time — would be able to thank God for anything which keeps down his pride, and sets him in his proper place. The day is soon coming, when we shall be taken off the false heights which we often stand upon, and be brought to our true level — when all the esteem of others shall vanish and pass away like smoke — and we shall be just what God finds us to be, neither more nor less! A third way in which a really humble Christian shows himself is by having a high opinion of others. Paul says, 'In lowliness of mind — let each esteem other better than himself.' 'Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.'

Whenever you see a person who appears to take every opportunity of putting down others — mark him down as a proud man — and be sure that he does it in order to exalt himself. On the other hand, whenever you see any one anxious to hide his brother's failings, unwilling to expose his little defects — you will generally find that he is a humble man, and one who deeply feels the many faults of his own character.

How often too it happens, that when we begin to know and feel a little on religious subjects — the great enemy tries to puff us up. He tempts us to speak uncharitably of those about us, to complain that this person is worldly, and that person is inconsistent; and in fact almost to think that no one is right but ourselves. For Satan had much rather that we should busy ourselves with other hearts than with our own.

'Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins!' 1 Peter 4:8

Fourthly, a humble Christian is teachable. He is conscious that he knows nothing yet as he ought to know, and that he has much, very much, yet to learn. Such a person will read his Bible with profit, seeking to become wiser in the ways of God. The hours which he spends in the house of God will be profitable hours; for he will be eager to feed upon the bread which comes down from Heaven, and to drink of the fountain of the water of life. The proud man will be quite satisfied with what he already knows — while the humble man will long to know more of God, and to love Him more.

Fifthly, a humble Christian is unwilling to thrust himself forward. He will not be like the Pharisees whom we read of, who loved greetings in the market, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi!' Nor is he like haughty Jehu, who called to Jehoshaphat and said, 'Come with me — and see my zeal for the Lord.' On the contrary, he will wish to avoid observation as much as possible. If he gives money away in charity, he will do it as quietly as he can, according to our Savior's rule, 'Let not your left hand know what your right hand does.' If he prays, he will not wish all the world to know it. If he comes to the house of God, he will go quietly to his place, and there he will pour out his heart before the Lord — for he comes not here to be seen by men, but to offer up his unworthy prayers to the Father of Mercies, and to listen to His message of love. Or, if he talks on religious subjects, he will say as little as possible about himself. If compelled to speak of himself, it will not be to show what a good Christian he is, but rather to acknowledge how unworthy he is, and to display the riches of God's grace in the salvation of one so utterly undeserving.

After all, it is easy to describe a humble person — but it is rare to find one! Some people who are not pious may have a humble manner — and the hypocrite too may display a great outward show of humility. For, alas, a seeming humbleness in the outward conduct may all the while cover a very proud heart — but this is not Christian humility. What we are now speaking of is heart-lowliness; and this is only to be found in that heart which is renewed by the Spirit of God. It does not belong to the old nature, but to the new; and therefore the Christian is exhorted to put it on, as something which he never wore before. 'Therefore, (says Paul), as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved — clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.' And another Apostle says, 'Be clothed with humility.'

What a lovely thing is true Christian humility! Our Savior, as we have seen, possessed it in all its purity — and the more we become like Him, the more will it adorn our character. If you wish to grow in grace — seek to be humble; for it is written, 'God resists the proud — but gives grace to the humble.' The proud heart is puffed up; and like the inn at Bethlehem, there is no room for the meek and lowly Savior there. But the humble heart receives Him joyfully. Jesus delights to dwell in such hearts, and to fill them with His fullness.

'For this is what the high and lofty One says — He who lives forever, whose name is holy: I live in a high and holy place, but also with him who is contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.' And just as the showers of rain slide off from the lofty hills, and rest in the valleys below — so it is the humble and lowly in heart who receive the largest supplies of grace, and bear the most abundant fruit.

Then make it a subject of earnest prayer to God that you may possess this humility — that you may daily become more humble. And to this end, ask Him to stifle every proud thought as it rises up within you, and to bend you very low in the dust. Think much of Jesus, the meek and lowly Savior. Put yourself often in His presence. Seek His spirit — the spirit of real humility. Put self aside as much as possible — for I believe that true humility consists, not so much in thinking basely of ourselves, as in not thinking of ourselves at all.

It was said of Moses, that when He came down from the mount, where he had been with God, there was an unusual glory upon his countenance. And so will there be on ours — not an outward glory, but an inward and heavenly brightness. We cannot be in our Lord's presence, without bringing away something of His lovely character. But remember, it is further said of Moses, that 'he was not aware that his face shone' — he was not conscious of his own glory. May you and I enjoy such a close fellowship with God, that we may shine with an unusual brilliancy — while we are all the while ignorant of that brilliancy ourselves! And we may be sure of this, that if we possess true humility now, we shall carry it with us to Heaven — its stamp will be indelibly marked upon us. There we shall have it in perfection. The inhabitants of that glorious world have no pride. The very angels cover their feet in the presence of God. They veil their faces, and abase themselves continually before Him. And we, if through God's infinite mercy we reach that holy place, though we shall then be freed from every sin — yet shall fall down before Him who sits upon the throne, and worship Him that lives forever, and shall cast our crowns before the throne, never uttering one boastful word of our own worthiness, but forever saying, 'Worthy is the Lamb who was slain — to receive power, and honor, and glory, and blessing!'

03.11. The Touchstone of HOLINESS

11. The Touchstone of HOLINESS

Holiness is the great end of all true religion. Holiness is . . .

the unfailing mark by which God's people are known everywhere;

'the spot of His children;'

the one unmistakable feature which distinguishes His family;

the highest step which can be attained in the Christian life.

It is of course important that we should have a sound and clear view of doctrine. The awakening of our souls is also important, and the consciousness that we need a Savior. But such knowledge and such feelings are worthless — if they do not lead onward to holiness of heart and life. But let us clearly understand what we mean by Holiness.

Holiness is not a mere outward ornament of the Christian character, something put on for the gaze and admiration of men. It is true that it must be outward, but not merely so. A person may act religiously — he may take a high tone from grounds of expediency, or because he may chance to be thrown among men of rectitude — and yet there may not be a spark of real spiritual holiness in him. Lift up the outer covering, and perhaps you will find a miserable blank within.

Holiness is a grace which belongs to the inner life. The heart, the affections, the desires — all must be holy. The heart within must be pure — or the waters which flow from it will fail to be pure also.

It is easy enough to clothe oneself in the outward garb of holiness, to have a righteous deportment, to have religious words upon our lips, to use religious phrases in our common talk, and even to show some interest in forwarding the outworks of Christ's kingdom. But this may be only tinsel which makes a glitter; whereas the precious ore must be there, deep in the heart, running through the whole man.

Again, holiness is not a sudden acquirement — it is gradual and progressive in its nature. There is often a great mistake on this point. There are some people who, when they first wake up to the necessity and blessedness of a pious life, seem to expect that there is a swift and royal road, by which the highest spiritual state may be reached at a single bound. It is true that a person's conversion may be sudden. He may in an instant be aroused from a long life of indifference, and from that moment become a new and altered character. He may suddenly wake up to the feeling that he has hitherto lived in vain. He may at once see the misery of sin, and may long to be delivered from its hateful bondage. He may forthwith set his face heavenward. But there is no such thing as a sudden leap from a state of sin — to the highest state of holiness. It must needs be a gradual work, not of a day, but of a life. Our sinful nature, which has grown up with us, must be subdued and overcome — and we must be molded into Jesus' image. This sin must be put away

— and that evil habit conquered. The right hand has to be cut off — and the right eye plucked out; and these are no easy operations. We must fight and struggle; we must contend with self, as well as with our great spiritual foe. And this battle will be going on to the very last.

But, thank God, there is no uncertainty about the outcome — the victory is ours, if only we are in earnest; we shall be sure to conquer in His strength.

Such is Holiness. Truly it is . . .

the crowning grace of the Christian life,

the unfailing result of God's real work in the soul,

the topstone of that spiritual building which is of His own structure. And now there is a very important inquiry for every earnest person: 'How can this state of holiness, this higher and purer life, be attained? Is it beyond our reach? Is it something ideal, which cannot be grasped by ordinary Christians? No — it may be acquired by every one of us. But how?

First, bear in mind that it is the work of God Himself — the blessed work of His Holy Spirit. In passing over some of the wild commons of this country, if you were suddenly to come upon a field of corn, or a cultivated garden of herbs — you would know that these cannot be the natural product of the soil. You would be sure that the cultivator's spade, and the sower's practiced arm, must have been there. And so, wherever we find Holiness, we may be equally sure that it is not natural to the soil of the human heart. It has been planted there by the heavenly Gardener — and there has been a work, and perhaps a long and difficult work, of cultivation within. The soil has been turned up, the seed has been sown, and the dew has descended from an unseen hand. Remember then that God alone, by the indwelling power of His Holy Spirit, can make us holy.

Secondly, though the work of Holiness is God's work in the heart, we must work with Him. Prayerful, earnest, persevering efforts are needed on our part. We must deny ourselves, and take up our cross. We must make war against sin, and be upon our guard against its intrusions. We must not only pray, 'Lead us not into temptation' — but we must be ever on our watch, and carefully close up every avenue by which it may enter. Our life must be an unerring endeavor to be holy as God is holy.

Thirdly, since God works by means — we must thankfully employ them.

Now, one great means of our sanctification is the WORD of God. 'Sanctify them (said our Lord) through your truth — your word is truth.' He has given us His word, 'that we may grow thereby.' The Bible not only teaches us how to serve God — but also feeds our souls, and strengthens us for His service. There is a transforming power in it. It not only speaks to us of God's glory and beauty, but when it is brought home to us, we are changed into Jesus' image from glory to glory. The devout, reverent, and thoughtful reading of Holy Scripture brings us into acquaintance and harmony with God, and fills our souls with love towards Him. And I ask — have not our hearts sometimes burned within us, while He has talked with us along the way, and while He has opened the Scriptures to us?

God has also given us PRAYER, by which we draw near to Him, and hold fellowship with Him. Prayer is the great secret in every stage of the Christian life — and especially as we approach the

higher steps in our course. And he who is much in prayer is in a fair way to become a holy person. His sails are being filled with the favoring breeze, which wafts him towards the desired haven.

Times of RETIREMENT too are essential to the Christian, if he would live near to God. Our blessed Lord, who was so much with others, often sought retirement. He needed to hold communion with His Father above, and tasted of its sweetness. And if we would possess anything of that calm peace and repose ourselves, we must act as He did, who rose up a great while before day, and departed into a solitary place and prayed — every spot being to us as the house of God, and every occasion a consecrated hour.

Well is it for us if we know the blessedness of thus putting ourselves often in God's immediate presence. There is . . .

so much in the world to drag us down,

so much to chill and ruffle us,

so much to engross our thoughts,

so much chain them our hearts to this earth,

so much to call us away from what is high and holy

— that it is absolutely essential to our growth in grace to withdraw ourselves from time to time from our worldly pursuits and worldly companions, and to hold communion with our Lord; to lay our souls as it were in His bosom, and to hide ourselves in Him. For it is by personal applications to the Savior, that we get fresh supplies of grace and strength for growth in the spiritual life. But there is a Special Ordinance, which our Lord has Himself ordained for the spiritual nurture of His children, in which the soul of the earnest believer is brought near to Christ, and is purified, strengthened, and refreshed by Him. Go to that heavenly Feast with a humble, believing, loving heart — and you will be strengthened for your onward journey, and your walk will be close with God.

There are now two questions which I should like to consider before closing this chapter.

One is, where should our Holiness show itself? Not merely in the House of God, nor in the actual exercises of religion, nor in the company of godly people — but in our every-day life, in our transactions with the world, in our fellowship with ordinary men. But there is one place in which it should specially show itself — in our Homes, in our Family Circles. There is nowhere that the Christian's true character is better tested, than in his own household. There can be nothing put on there. All know each other too intimately for any deception. Outside religion may pass with the outside world — but it will miserably break down inside the Home. All hypocrisy will fail there — reality alone will make itself felt. Personal Holiness will be ever diffusing itself, whether found in Husband or Wife, Parent or Child, Master or Servant. It is like the perfume which manifests itself — the whole house is filled with the fragrance of the ointment. What the playground is to the schoolboy — the home is to the man. They are the truest tests of character. The other question which I wish to notice is this: Will our state of holiness be ever perfect?

God's work in the renewed soul is a perfect work. There is no incompleteness or defect in the Spirit's power, no stint on His part. But alas He has sinful hearts to work upon, and therefore there will ever be a falling short — we shall never reach perfection here on earth. He bids us to be holy — as He is holy; to be perfect — as our Father in Heaven is perfect — and He gives us all the aid we need. But we are forever failing, ever dragging after us a body of sin, ever aiming it may be — but always coming short, never fully reaching the mark we so long to attain. And well indeed is it if even the desire has been kindled within us. Well is it if we can truly say, 'I am earnestly pressing towards the mark,' though there will ever be something higher and beyond, a prize which these soiled hands of ours are too feeble to grasp.

No, we shall never be perfectly or completely holy here. We shall always need the blood of sprinkling. Our look must ever be towards the cross, and our cry to the very last, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!'

Perfect holiness is reserved for another state. In Heaven all will be complete. We shall then bid adieu to sin, and that forever — it will find no entrance into those high courts. Heaven will be a holy place — for it is the presence-chamber of God Himself, and the dwelling-place of His people. And if we are there, washed from all our sins in the blood of the Lamb, and perfect through His righteousness — our hearts and feelings will be all in blessed accord with that sinless, heavenly throng. Be ever trying then to rise higher. Let each step be a step onward. Let your motto be, 'A little further from sin — a little nearer to God!' until you reach a calmer and a purer region, unswayed by the eddies and currents of this sinful world, and where the presence of Jesus Himself is realized in all its fullness.

03.12. The Touchstone of CHRISTIAN WARFARE

12. The Touchstone of CHRISTIAN WARFARE The Bible, when referring to the Christian course, usually speaks of it as something that calls forth all our energy and earnestness. It is described as a Race, a Battle, a Struggle, a Contest. And yet, at other times, the language of Holy Scripture is somewhat different — for eternal life is set before us as a gift, a free gift, purchased for us at the cost of Christ's atoning blood, and made over to every true believer who is willing to accept it. In one passage the apostle Paul seems to combine these two opposite ideas, when he says, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling — for it is God who works in you both to will and do of his own good pleasure.' From this we learn that in one sense salvation is to be received as an unmerited blessing — but in another sense as something which can only be obtained by effort. The fact is this — that on the part of God, Heaven is a gift — an undeserved gift; a gift which no one can claim as a right; a purchased possession, made over to us by one who loves us, and won for us by Him who died that we might live. But on our part great exertion is needed to overcome our evil nature — great watchfulness, lest we miss the path which leads to Heaven — a constant putting off the sins of the flesh, and a putting on of the new man, 'which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.' Hence our Lord says, 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate — for many shall seek (or wish) to enter in and shall not be able.' 'The kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it!'

Truly, the Christian life is not easy. He has to contend with SELF at every stage of his course — self-indulgence, self-exaltation, self-dependence. He has to fight against some dominant evil passion, which is forever striving for the ascendancy. He has constantly to be keeping under control some hydra-headed sin — the sin which most easily besets him. And here is the great difficulty of the Christian's course. It is not one or two special efforts which we have to make — but it is a life-long effort, a continued conflict, and not a thing accomplished in a moment.

I ask you: Is it an easy thing to shake off habits of long standing, which have become a second nature to you? Is it easy to bid farewell to sins which have for years been your close companions? Is it easy to root up that which has embedded itself deep in the soil? Does it not need much self-denial, much effort, much painful self-crucifixion? Were it not for the Savior's promise, 'My grace is sufficient for you' — would not some of us be disposed to give up all in despair?

Then too we have the TEMPTER ever trying to obtain the mastery over us, using every opportunity to snatch us, if possible, out of the Savior's hands. Against him there is a constant, daily warfare, a ceaseless contest. For 'we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.' And the WORLD is ranged against us also, whispering in our ear, 'Why give yourself so much anxiety and effort? Why toil so unremittingly for an unseen prize? When I have pleasures to offer you now — why seek those which are to come? And yet there is something within, I trust, which tells you that you have chosen the better part — something which says, 'Hold fast that which you have, that no man take your crown.'

Thus we have three great enemies to contend with —

one within our own hearts;

another external, though unseen; and

another before our very eyes, but dressed up in various forms, and pressing itself upon us in our every-day life. In other words, the Flesh, the Devil, and the World.

Hence it is necessary to be . . .

ever fighting,

ever running the toilsome race,

ever striving for the mastery. But if the contest is so ceaseless and so arduous, and we ourselves so feeble, and so easily overcome — what reasonable hope is there of ultimate victory?

Let us see what aids are at our disposal. Thank God, we have abundant help at hand.

There are, in the first place, pious Friends, with whom we may take counsel, and whose very companionship will be to us a tower of strength. 'Two are better than one' in this warfare. For 'As iron sharpens iron — so one man sharpens another.' And who can tell how much we may in this way help one another? Who can tell the immense influence that one friend, whom we love and respect, may have upon our daily conduct — checking us when disposed to do wrong, and encouraging us when inclined to do right. And this influence is often felt by us, even though our friend may be far away from us.

Then, we are members of a Christian Church; we are banded together in a great spiritual brotherhood; we belong to a society framed not after man's model, but after God's. Here is an additional help. We are not alone, struggling each one by himself — but we are a closely united body, an army in which each fills his rank. Our Church takes us by the hand, as it were, teaching us, guiding us, sustaining us. She provides services suited to our needs, and calls us to partake of them. She lays down certain rules and directions, and bids us to follow them.

Further, we have our Bibles, from which we may gather daily nourishment and strength for our souls, and which we may always appeal to as our great directory. If we read God's Word daily — if we read it with reverence, humility, and prayer, looking up for God's teaching — we shall 'grow thereby;' our faith will be strengthened and our views established.

We have our seasons of Private Prayer too, when we may draw near to God, and obtain His aid. There, at the mercy-seat, is our constant source of strength, a spring from which we may draw living water, and which we can never exhaust; for God is always near, ready to hear our cries, and to relieve our needs. And then we have our Public Worship, and God has given a special promise that He will meet us in His Sanctuary, and bless us.

Above all, there is that Sacred Feast, in which we may feed upon Christ, the Living Bread, and partake of His very Body and Blood, for the sustaining and refreshing of our souls.

Thus God is with us, hemming us in with the Pillar and the Cloud — though we see them not; stretching out His hand to uphold us — and placing underneath the everlasting arms.

Jesus too is with us, ever near, walking upon the waters of this world, and saying to us, 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you! I have called you by name — you are Mine! My cross is your ransom, and Myself your strength.' The Holy Spirit is also with us, 'helping our infirmities,' and invigorating us with His indwelling presence.

What more do we want? Is there not here abundant help suited to our every need? Let us then fight our battle boldly. Let us run our race without flagging. Let us strive earnestly for the prize held out to us. But we should never forget that our efforts must not only be vigorous and earnest, but they must also be unceasing. There is no time to lose, no room for delay, no pausing and resting — as if our warfare were accomplished. For the present we must be as warriors, never laying down our weapons, or imagining that we may be at rest. We must fight the good fight of faith. We must guard the citadel. We must 'Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, and be strong.'

But, thank God, it will not always be so. Our time of warfare will have an end. The cry of Battle will be exchanged for the shout of Victory. It was the thought of this which cheered the great Apostle. No one fought more manfully or incessantly than he did. He gloried in the wounds which he incurred for his Master's sake, 'I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.' But then he looked forward to the resting days which were near.

God grant that we may be enabled to catch something of the Apostle's feeling which he expresses when he says, 'I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith!' Here was . . .

assurance without boasting,

faith without over-confidence,

trust without pride.

He does not say, 'I have acquitted myself well. I have fought with praiseworthy courage.' But he says, 'I have fought — and it has been a good fight. The battle in which I have engaged is a noble warfare. My course, however imperfect, is now closing; and God be praised — He has enabled me to keep the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.'

Oh that such may be the peaceful expression of our hearts as the time of our departure draws near!

03.13. The Touchstone of PURITY

13. The Touchstone of PURITY

"To the pure, all things are pure — but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted." Titus 1:15

I propose in this chapter to take 'Purity' in its widest and fullest sense, as including purity of motive, purity of heart, inward holiness, an unstained life, etc. And to this subject, so important to the Christian, I wish faithfully to apply the Touchstone — so that each one of us may ascertain for himself if he possesses that purity which God requires of His people.

1. It seems as if there were some in the world in whom this purity is almost inborn. They are naturally amiable, naturally well disposed, naturally blameless in their conduct.

There are in America, and also in some parts of Europe, forests which have existed for hundreds of years. The trees in these forests are of nature's growth. They have not been planted by the hand of man, but are the natural outcome of the soil. They are beautiful in their symmetry, and require no training.

Again, among our English cornfields we now and then see a field of wheat or oats which have been self-sown. The crop of the former year was gathered in when overripe, and some of the grain was shed, which has sprung up of its own accord, producing a crop in the coming year. So there are some people who seem to be naturally religious — or rather religious from their earliest days. We may almost say that the seed of true religion was self-sown in their hearts. They are free from open sin. They are gentle and amiable. They have embraced, as a matter of course, the truth of God, and it has become almost a part of their nature. These are indeed beautiful characters as far as they go, though they are sometimes found unequal to any great effort, and may lack strength at any special crisis. They have not, and probably never had, any doubts or misgivings. God's Word is welcome to them. They receive it unhesitatingly, 'not as the word of man, but as the word of God, which lives and abides for them.' To such pure minds as these, 'all things are pure.' They see no difficulties in the way. The temptations of the Great Enemy fly over them, and leave them unscathed. Their minds are too pure to be injured by these fiery darts. Ungodliness and worldliness do not seem to touch them — and the things of God are lovely in their eyes. There is evil all around them, but they are armored against it — they are not contaminated by it. One cannot but admire such naturally religious people, and wish that there were more of them to be met with.

2. But there is another class of Christians, who are even more to be admired, and whose high standard we may all of us (if we seek God's help) be enabled to reach. I mean those who, though once perhaps careless and worldly — have been awakened by the grace of God, have been enabled to conquer self, and by earnest and persevering prayer have become so conformed to the image of Christ, that to live near to Him, and to walk in the narrow path of holiness, has become their second nature. They now breathe an atmosphere of purity. The heavenly life is already begun

in them; they are living for another world, and to know God and to serve Him, to love Him and to work for Him — is their everyday delight. They have arrived at this state by slow degrees, and perhaps after much conflict, and have at length attained to that purity of heart which is acceptable to God.

Now to these also 'all things are pure.' What others stumble at, and what they themselves once stumbled at — is no longer to them an occasion of falling. They hear impure words spoken, and witness too often the deeds of the ungodly — but they remain untainted, their garments are unspotted by the flesh. Moreover, they are inclined to take a charitable view, and put a good interpretation upon the words and conduct of others, which many are disposed to carp at. And as the bee gathers honey from every flower which comes in its way, so they turn to profit almost every event of life, extracting even good out of evil, and sweetness from what is bitter. Yes, to these pure ones 'all things are pure.'

3. But there is another side to the picture. There are some to whom nothing is pure — but their minds and consciences are corrupted.

Here is the reverse of what has been said. To one . . .

who is defiled by the admission of sin into his heart,

who walks according to the course of this world,

who gives way to the natural bent of his uncontrolled mind,

who lets loose the reins and allows himself in the practice of evil,

who rejects the truth of God,

who glories in his freedom from those religious shackles which bind others

— to him 'nothing is pure.' Evil is ever present with him, and like a jaundiced man, to whom whatever he see or tastes is nauseous — so he takes a wrong view of even what is right; for his mind and conscience are corrupted.

Now, to this I feel that you will readily assent. But we have regarded the subject as yet only in a general way. Let us now try and gather from it at least TWO PRACTICAL LESSONS for ourselves. The first is that we should, all of us, aim at this purity. 'Blessed (says our Lord) are the pure in heart — for they shall see God.' It is a great mercy if we have been taught to feel the evil of sin, if God in His love has led us to the cross, there to obtain pardon and acceptance with Him. Oh, who can tell how great is this blessing! Happy are those who enjoy it, having been brought near to God through the atoning blood of Christ. But there is a higher state than this. There is something more to be desired than mere pardon and acceptance. There is a yet more exalted standard for the Christian to reach. He must not rest until he indeed hates whatever God hates, and loves whatever He loves — until his one great desire is to be ever seeking to do God's will in all things, bearing the Savior's cross cheerfully, and faithfully following His footsteps; ever striving, in fact, to be as holy as God is holy, and as perfect as He is perfect. Are we thus advancing in our Christian course? Is the work of purification going on within us? Are we growing in grace, and pressing on to a higher and yet higher state? But there is one phase of Purity to which I cannot help specially alluding. I

mean Moral Purity — the purity of our thoughts, of our desires, of our words, and also of our deeds. Sometimes alas our bodies are the instruments of evil, when they ought only to be the instruments of good. But we should remember that, as Christians, our bodies are consecrated to God's service, for it is written, 'The body is for the Lord.' Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. 'I will dwell in them (He says), and walk in them.'

How careful then we should be to preserve them as such — to use them for no unholy purpose, to allow no stain to rest upon them, but to devote them to God's service, ever remembering the Apostle's injunction, 'Keep yourself pure!' With regard to purity in general — may it ever be growing and deepening its hold of us, so that we may become pure within; and may unconsciously display such purity of heart and life, as will bear the scrutiny of Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. It is true that we cannot reach perfection, sinless perfection. We cannot attain to perfect holiness. But as he who would hit the distant target with his arrow must aim high, so should we. May God give us more and more of this purity of heart, and make us to grow up unto Him in all things.

Another lesson suggested to us by the consideration of this subject is, that Purity of heart is the best safeguard against unbelief. There is alas in the present day a great amount of skepticism, both open and secret, both head unbelief and heart unbelief; both that which springs from the intellect and that which arises from a spirit of indifference. And where do we find this unbelief prevailing? It generally prevails among the careless, the worldly, and the lovers of sin — but rarely among the true-hearted and pure-minded. It is true that sometimes even God's children are exercised by unbelieving thoughts; for Satan tries hard to snatch them out of God's hands. But, as I showed in my first chapter, there is this great difference between the two: the one cherish and encourage their unbelief; but the other abhor it — it brings a dark shade over their souls. And if you earnestly desire to be emancipated from the doubts and difficulties which may be troubling you — be much in prayer, draw near to God; and as He more and more manifests Himself unto you — the more will every cloud be dissipated which now gathers round you. 'To the pure all things are pure, 'and the pureness and holiness of God's revelation specially commends itself to those hearts which are striving after holiness. May God give us grace to rise higher in the Christian scale, to breathe more of the pure atmosphere of Heaven, to live more in God's presence here — so that, whenever He is pleased to call us hence, we may be ready, quite ready, to 'depart and be with Christ, which is far better!'

03.14. The Touchstone of RELIGIOUS DECISION

14. The Touchstone of RELIGIOUS DECISION

It is not, I would think, at all likely that this book will fall into the hands of anyone who is openly and directly opposed to Christianity. But the reader may possibly be in a doubting, undecided, and wavering state of mind — neither for Christ nor against Him; drawn up to a certain point by religious influence — but pulled down again by the stronger attractions of the world.

What is the consequence? Such people are neither safe nor happy — not safe, because Christ disowns them; and not happy, for they know nothing of the peace, and joy, and comfort of genuine religion.

Even in worldly matters we despise a man who is undecided. A Physician may be a man of great cleverness and skill, but if he is timid and hesitating, we shall not care to have him by our bedside. An Officer in command of an army is powerless in action, if he lacks boldness and fixedness of character. A Farmer is not likely to succeed who has no definite plan or determination of purpose, in the management of his land; for 'he who observes the wind (That is, he who is always doubting about the weather), shall not sow; and he who regards the clouds shall not reap.' And is it different in spiritual things? No — a hesitating spirit imperils the soul, and that forever.

If there is one thing that I would recommend more earnestly than another, it is fixedness in religion — decision for Christ. It is necessary, for God requires it — you cannot be useful without it — and further, it is essential to your happiness.

God requires it. He is a jealous God. He says to us, 'My son, give me your heart.' He warns us, 'You cannot serve two masters!' 'Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads unto life!' 'The kingdom of Heaven has been forcefully advancing — and forceful men lay hold of it!' 'He who is not with me — is against me.'

How displeasing it must be to our Lord to see the coldness and indifference of His professed followers — to see the earnestness which men show as regards their farms and merchandise, their gains and pleasures; and how indifferent they are about His glory and the salvation of their souls. Nothing less than real devotedness, and an actual surrender of the heart — in fact, nothing short of genuine conversion — will be accepted by Him, 'Unless you are converted, you cannot enter the kingdom of Heaven.'

Again, you cannot be useful without it. The Tree which is profitable — is the tree that has firm hold of the soil, and is vigorous in its growth. The Stream which works the mill — is that which flows in a steady, onward course. The Statesman, who serves his sovereign and his country — is he who has a clear and decided policy, and who has fixed principles on which he acts. The man who prospers in life — is he who has a definite purpose of action, a clear course before him, and a fixed determination to carry out that purpose. Such a one, though on some points he may be less gifted than others, will be nearly sure to succeed.

Just so, it is the Christian whose mind is made up, who sees the right course and determinedly follows it, whose motto is, 'This one thing I do!' — he it is who works heartily for his Lord, and accomplishes great things for Him. This decision is further essential to our happiness. There are, I believe, many who are sound enough in their religious views, and clear in matters of doctrine — who recoil from error as they would from poison, and speak of truth as if they really loved it. Yes, and perhaps they do love it. The doctrines of the gospel are welcome to them. Christ is to a certain extent precious to their souls. He is 'the ground and pillar' of their faith — the foundation of all their hopes. In time of danger and trial, or in the prospect of death, they fly to Him as their refuge, and cling to His Cross. And yet they cannot say that He is the abiding joy of their hearts, that they are happy in His service, that they rejoice in His love. And why so? Since in a measure they run well — what hinders them from the full enjoyment of Christ? There is nothing wrong on the outside. No defect is perhaps visible. And yet, if they speak the truth, they will confess that theirs is not a happy type of religion. They hear of it in others; they know that there is a peace which Christ gives — but it is not theirs; they do not possess it; they are strangers to it.

Now, if we could look into their hearts, we would perhaps see the reason — they have never surrendered themselves entirely to the Savior; they have given themselves in part, but not wholly, to Him; they have kept back a little corner of their hearts for the world and for sin; they have not given Him ALL.

I am bound to tell you that you will never be happy so long as, like Ananias, you keep back a part of your offering. Christ will have it all — or you can be none of His. Let me then urge you at once to make this surrender — honestly, truly, and deliberately. That will indeed be a marked day in your life, when you resolve to consecrate yourself, with all you have and with all you are, to the Lord.

Many, I know, make such a resolution as this under special excitement. Their feelings are wrought up to a high pitch, and in a moment of fervor they exclaim, 'Christ shall have all my heart!' But then, when they get back again into the chilling world, their hearts, like the heated iron, return to their hardness. It is so with thousands, and it is this which brings religion into contempt. And therefore I exhort you to make this surrender honestly, truly, and deliberately. Sit down and count the cost. Think what you will lose, and what you will gain, by such a step. You will lose perhaps the world's approval, and the world's friendship. You will lose the pleasures of sin for a season. But oh, how great your gain will be! You will gain Christ! You will gain Heaven! You will gain eternal life! Yes, count the cost — and then yield yourself up wholly and unreservedly to your Lord. And now for a few PRACTICAL WORDS OF ADVICE.

We all of us in these days enjoy many and great religious advantages. Books, and Scriptures, and teachers are all near at hand to us. We have abundant means of grace, both public and private. Depend upon it, these things must have their effect upon us. They cannot leave us as we are. Ask yourself then: What effect are they having upon me? Are they moving my sluggish heart? Are they stirring me up to newness of life?

Oh, if the Spirit of God has brooded over you, convincing you of sin, and making you feel its exceeding sinfulness and misery — showing Christ to you as the one only remedy for your guilt, as the priceless Savior of the lost — if He has awakened in you the desire to lead a new and altered life — then I would say to you, and that with all affection — do not trifle with convictions. If it is God's work, do not tamper with it. Do not quench that gracious Spirit who has spoken to you. Do

not allow the world to choke the good seed. Do not allow its business, its cares, or its pleasures — to draw you aside. Do not allow Satan to tempt you with the fatal idea that you may at some other time give yourself to the Lord. No, it is now — or perhaps never.

Go, my brother, or my sister, and when no eye is upon you, on your bended knees before God say, 'Lord, I give myself to You! Accept me, and make me Your forever!' And pray, pray earnestly, that God will give you grace and strength to be true and faithful to Him.

Go out into the world, and with feelings, and desires, and hopes altogether changed — live for Christ, live for Heaven. Desire only to do the will of God, and to serve Him heartily during your little day of life. In following Christ you will find many difficulties, but God will give you all the help you need. His House will be open to you, and you will find great help in Public Prayer, and under the preaching of the Word. The sacred feast of Christ's Body and Blood will be spread for you, and you will receive strength in that most precious ordinance — spiritual food to sustain and refresh your soul — a blessed means of uniting you more closely with your Lord. And remember too, the way is ever open for your drawing near to Him in private. He is always on the mercy-seat, ready to receive you. 'Let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.'

Finally I entreat you . . .

by the love and gentleness of Christ,

by that love which brought Him down from Heaven for you,

by that love which has borne with you day after day, and year after year,

by that love which is ready to welcome you and make you His

— give Him your allegiance, give Him your heart, give Him the little remnant that is left of your life. Come to Him as you are, not waiting to be fit — but in all your unfitness, and all your guilt. Come to Him as the Physician to heal you, as One who is able and willing (oh, how willing!) to pardon you, and wash away your sins in His own blood. Believe Him when He says, 'I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions for my own sake, and will not remember your sins.'

Come to Him now — tomorrow may be too late. And may God give you grace to adopt the Psalmist's resolution, and to experience the Psalmist's joy, 'My heart is fixed, O God! My heart is fixed! I will sing, and give praise.'

03.15. The Touchstone of OPPORTUNITY

15. The Touchstone of OPPORTUNITY

"Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." Ephesians 5:15-16 "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Psalms 90:12 To use our time well and wisely, is a matter of the greatest importance — for oh, how quickly is it passing away! We should seize our opportunities while they exist, and 'gather up the fragments which remain, that nothing be lost.' The value of time — its exceeding preciousness — is beyond measure. Our days and hours hasten by, never to return. They are like water, which, when once spilt, cannot be gathered up again. They are like the rays of the sun, which at the moment may warm and invigorate us, but cannot be laid up for future use. Our lives are very short at best — and on the manner in which they are spent will depend our condition forever. Who can say then how important is every moment which is given to us? It may be turned to good account — or it may be wasted, or misspent. No wonder then that we are charged, 'Be very careful, then, how you live — not as unwise but as wise' — like travelers on a dangerous road, looking around them on every side, and prepared for any difficulty which may suddenly arise. We should live cautiously and carefully, 'making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.'

It is very important, through life, to seize our opportunities, when they occur. It is so in worldly matters. How many owe their whole success in life to the power of being able to see the golden moment, and catch it before it flies! The difference between success and failure — is often owing to the fact that one grasps his opportunity, and another lets it slip by. An unanswered letter, an appointment broken, a train missed — may for anything we know change the color of our whole existence. And as we look back, do we not see upon what very trivial things — mere accidents apparently have hinged the most important events of our lives? A situation applied for at once, and gained just at the nick of time — a proposal cordially accepted, and not put aside and neglected — a letter answered without delay — an appointment kept, with trouble and pains perhaps, but still kept. These small things have many a time proved to be the keystone of the arch, on which our success in life has been built.

Promptness and decision are all-important for those who desire to leave their mark in the world. Of course the wisest will sometimes make mistakes. But on the whole, far more harm is done by sluggishness and hesitation — than by haste and decision. The feeble man, who never can make up his mind, who lets chance after chance go by, is always a little too late for everything, and never knows that success is near at hand, until it passes away, and is gone forever. Only for a single moment is the tide at its height, and once turned, it flows back forever; the opportunity is lost.

Thus the prudent Farmer will seize the proper moment to reap his corn, or to cut his hay; and will watch the fluctuations in the market to sell his produce. The wise General will lead on his troops to attack the enemy when off their guard. The Sailor will wait until the storm-signals are lowered,

before he puts to sea. The Physician anxiously watches his patient, and at the turn of the fever administers the reviving tonic. This is 'redeeming the time,' seizing the opportunity as it offers, striking while the iron is hot, acting at the proper time. And so also should we act in matters which concern our souls.

If an opportunity is presented to us of doing some important work, we should at once seize it — or the work will be done by others, or remain altogether undone. A word spoken in season — how good is it! An act done just at the right time, and in the right way — what great results it may accomplish! It may prove to be the saving of a soul, and the rescuing of one who was on the verge of going wrong. 'To everything (says Solomon) there is a season, and a time to every purpose:

a time to weep — and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn — and a time to dance;

a time to reap-and a time to sow;

a time to keep silence — and a time to speak.'

If Moses had attempted to deliver Israel at the wrong moment, he would have failed — but he waited upon God, and He showed him when and how to act.

If Joshua had not struck the city of Jericho at the appointed time — its Walls would not have fallen. When Paul was at Philippi he went on the Sabbath day to a place where prayer was accustomed to be made, and there he joined the little band of worshipers. They put the sacred volume into his hand, and he expounded it. He seized the opportunity — and the result was the conversion of Lydia, one of his Jewish hearers.

Or, to bring the matter more home to ourselves, if God in His great mercy draws our hearts towards Himself — it is important at once to obey His call; and not to hesitate, lest the working of His grace should cease. A person goes to church. He has gone for years — but today he hears something which comes home to his very heart. Here is God's opportunity. He seems Himself to speak as He never spoke before. That voice may never speak so plainly again. Oh listen when He thus speaks — it may be the means of saving you. Let it pass — and its sound, its power, will soon die out, never to be heard or felt again. And what shall we say of those who let days, and months, and years pass — without thinking of anything beyond their own ease and enjoyment? Time is to them as a tale that is told, which has no particular interest for them, and is soon forgotten. It is like a vapor, which rises before them — but is speedily swept away, and is gone forever. One day is like another — all equally unprofitable — all gone to waste — nothing done for God or for eternity — a number of precious opportunities, but not one of them improved.

Bear in mind then that we all have our opportunities, if we will look out for them — opportunities of doing good, opportunities of benefitting our fellow-creatures, opportunities of doing some work for God — and for every one of these opportunities we must give an account. If neglected — great will be our loss. If seized — what great things may be done — how much may be accomplished, God may be honored — souls may be saved — our own souls, or the souls of others.

Again, our time is very, very short — and all depends upon the right employment of it. These striking words might once have been seen, written in large letters on the wall of an Italian house:

'A God — a moment — an eternity! A God who sees you — a moment which flees from you — an eternity which awaits you.' And remember that our time is contracting, and becoming shorter, every day.

One of the cruel tortures said to have been invented in some heathen country, was that of a cell, which at the prisoner's first entrance presented an appearance of comfort and ease. By degrees however he observed the dimensions of his chamber beginning to contract, and the fact became more appalling every day. Slowly, but terribly, the sides drew closer, and the unhappy victim was at last crushed to death.

What an emblem does this suggest of the sinner's contracting day of grace! Oh, what would the poor victim in such a cell have given to see the door open? Would he have lingered for a moment, think you? Would he not have seized the opportunity, and escaped for his life?

We have, many of us, done but little in the way of 'redeeming the time.' We have allowed it to pass by unimproved. We have lived too long in Sodom. Oh that we may arise as Lot did, and be gone; and while we linger, may the angels of God lay hold of our hands, and be merciful to us, and bring us forth, and set us without the city; so that we may never look back any more, but may escape to the mountain, and dwell safely upon the Rock of Ages.

If young, redeem the time while it is yours. And all the more so if old, for but a short moment or two remains for you!

Old and young alike, we have not an instant to lose. Let us redeem the time, before the evil days come, when our difficulties will perhaps increase an hundredfold. Let us take the tide at the flood, knowing that perhaps no more tides will come, at least for us; for there are but twelve hours in the day, and our last hour may be very near!

03.16. The Touchstone of Acceptable Worship

16. The Touchstone of Acceptable Worship My reader is probably a regular church-goer, and one who desires to go there, not merely for form's sake, but to get a real blessing to his soul. I propose then to make three inquiries:

What should we go to the House of God for?

What should we bring with us in going there? And what should we endeavor to carry away? The First of these will occupy the present chapter — and of the other Two I shall speak in my next chapter.

What then should we go to the House of God for? I answer, for a twofold purpose; namely, to speak to God, and to hear His message to us. We should speak to Him in Prayer — and we should listen to the word which He sends us by the mouth of His Ministers. In speaking to God, what should be the nature of our communication with Him?

Confession is a leading feature in it. We should come before God in deep humility and self-abasement, placing ourselves as penitents at His footstool. It is true, He knows our sins better than we know them ourselves — still it befits us, in our approaches to Him, to begin by confessing all that is wrong in us, and by acknowledging our unworthiness in His sight.

Such was the attitude of the Publican in the Temple. Such was the manner in which the repenting Prodigal drew near to his Father. And you will observe that our Church thus prepares her worshipers to enter upon their work. She brings before us a string of Texts, every one of which is of a penitential character; and then bids us kneel down and join in a General Confession, telling God that like lost sheep we are ever erring and straying from the path marked out for us.

Another feature — perhaps the principal feature — in our communication with God is Petition, or Entreaty. We ask for something. Most of the Prayers which we put up are so many petitions from needy souls to Him who is the great and gracious Giver. In the Litany, for instance, we ask directly for something in every clause — our petitions being not merely for ourselves, but for others also. Indeed the very word 'Litany' means Supplicatory Prayer. And have we not much to ask, when we come into God's presence? Should we not come as suppliants, lifting up our earnest cries for the pardon which we so much need, and for the supplies which we are continually requiring?

Then another important and delightful feature in our communication with God is Praise. We go into His House to thank Him for His goodness to us. And for this purpose we repeat large portions of the Psalms. What are many of those Psalms — but beautiful songs of praise, which express our thankfulness better than we can express it in our own words? The Creeds too, which are somewhat dry in themselves, may be repeated in this spirit of Praise, as a declaration of our thankful belief in what God is, and in what He has done for us. To this may be added the singing of those Hymns of Praise, in which our hearts find vent for their holy joy; and also that beautiful Prayer towards the close of our service, which expresses our thankfulness for all the ordinary

blessings of this life, but above all for God's inestimable love in the great work of our redemption. But I pass on to yet another feature in our communication with God, which I can only describe by the word Worship.

Now, this word is commonly used to signify Prayer generally; and thus we call our service, 'Public Worship.' But I wish now to use the word in its more restricted sense. By the term 'Worship' I wish to describe something apart and distinct from Confession, or Petition, or Praise — something different from either. The old English word was originally 'Worthship,' signifying the honor given to worth. It was formerly used in reference to men, as well as God. Thus in Wickliffe's Translation of the Bible, the Fifth Commandment ran thus; 'Worship your Father and Mother;' that is, Honor them. Also in certain passages of the Bible, as in Daniel, where it is said that 'the king worshiped Daniel.' Daniel 2:46. To worship God then is to pay an act of homage to Him, such as a Servant would pay to his Lord, or a Subject to his Sovereign. In our ordinary Prayers, we ask God for something — we expect something from Him — we pour out the heart, with all its felt necessities, trials, and needs, before Him. But in the act of Worship there is the idea not so much of benefit to ourselves, as of glory to God.

It is something more too than Adoration. Adoration is the lifting up of the heart in silence; but when we express this in earnest words, that is Worship in the truest sense — when we bow before the Lord, and pour forth the reverential feelings of our hearts. When Solomon reared the Temple of old, his design in all its magnificence and grandeur, was to show forth the honor due to God. The Prayers, and the gorgeous Ceremonies, and the immense and costly Offerings, the clouds of Incense, the flood of Music poured forth on that occasion — were all to express the honor, and glory, and praise of God. But we, in these days, come before God with a much simpler ritual, and with less costly ceremonies. But still, direct Worship is a part of our service. We worship Him whom our hearts adore, and whom the very saints in Heaven worship also.

Let us take the Lord's Prayer as an instance of what I am saying. Analyze that glorious Prayer, and you will find that much of it is simply Worship. The main idea pervading it, is the honor and glory of God. We place ourselves before Him as our Father, and we at once perform an act of Worship, exclaiming, 'Hallowed be your name. May your kingdom come. May your will be done, so that earth may be like Heaven.' And then, after three Petitions — one for daily food, another for daily pardon, and a third for daily preservation from evil — we close with the words, 'Yours is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever!' The 'Te Deum' too is a Hymn of Worship. There are here and there direct Petitions in it, and expressions of Praise; but the great body of it is strictly speaking Worship. We declare our admiration of God — we acknowledge Him to be the Lord. 'To you Cherubim and Seraphim continually cry: Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty!' 'Day by day we magnify you, and we worship your name, ever world without end.'

Again, towards the close of the 'Litany' we exclaim, 'O God, we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have declared unto us the noble works that you did in their days, and in the old time before them!' Observe, there is not a word here of Petition or Supplication — nothing is asked for; it is simple Worship. We express our adoring sense of what God has done, and is still doing, for us. And once more, in the Communion Service we also worship God in the strictest sense, when we say, 'With Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of Heaven, we laud and magnify your glorious name, saying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty — Heaven and earth are full of your

glory! Glory to you, O God, most high.' And again, 'We praise you, we bless you, we worship you — for you only are holy — you only are the Lord — you only, O Christ, are most high in the glory of God the Father.'

I lay stress upon these particular acts of Worship, because I think it is well that, when we come here, we should feel that it is not merely to ask something from God — not merely under the pressure of our needs — -but that we come to honor Him, to do Him homage, to glorify Him, to give Him the only thing we can give Him — the offerings of our lips. But it may be said with regard to Public Worship generally, and indeed all our services, 'How little can a poor sinner honor God!' This is true. But we must give Him what we are able to give, and what we know He will mercifully accept. In Isaiah's day the Jews brought the burnt offerings and their sacrifices; and the Lord was ever ready to accept them at their hands. Our sacrifices are those of Prayer, and Praise, and adoring Worship — and these He is graciously pleased to accept, if we place them on Christ's Altar, pleading His atonement. Yes, God loves to receive these offerings of our hearts — they are a sacrifice and a sweet-smelling savor to Him.

Such then are the component parts of our Public Services, so far as our Addresses to God are concerned. But there is another object for which we go to the House of God, and one of no small importance — and that is to receive the messages which He is pleased to send us. Christ employs Ministers as His Ambassadors. They come to us in God's name. They speak to us for Him. They preach Christ to us. They tell us of His love, and of His all-sufficiency to save. They speak of Him as the Friend of our souls — as the living, loving one, in whose shelter there is safety, and in whose bosom there is a resting-place of repose and peace.

If we undervalue this part of the Service, we are depreciating that Ordinance which God has appointed as the great means of bringing men to Himself — for it has pleased Him by the foolishness of preaching, not merely to benefit, but to save those who believe. This however I would say, That as important as preaching is, it is not, as some would seem to think, everything, or even the most important part of the service of the Sanctuary. Our Church reminds her children, more than any other Church does, that they are worshipers, and that Prayer is the leading feature in our Christian Assemblies.

Many of our brethren who belong to other Churches fall into the error of regarding the Sermon as the one great and absorbing feature in their religious gatherings. With them the Sermon is everything, and Prayer is a secondary object. This is clearly a mistake. For the chief errand on which we come here is to pray. The House of God is not merely a 'Place of Hearing' — but a 'House of Prayer.'

Let me now offer you two or three affectionate words of counsel.

Attend the House of God — not sometimes but always — not spasmodically but regularly. Your soul will starve if it is not periodically nourished by those appointed means of grace which God has in mercy provided for you. People frequently neglect the assembling of themselves together, on the plea that they can be just as much benefitted by reading and praying at home. But has not the Lord promised a blessing, and His own special presence — when we are gathered in His name? And dare we choose another method of our own? Would we not thus be dishonoring God?

Suppose a Friend of ours were to die, we might perhaps spend our time profitably by shutting ourselves up, and refusing to honor his memory by our presence at his funeral. Or, if some great Person were to be passing along the street, we might feel as much respect, and derive more profit to ourselves, by remaining at home, and refusing to join the throng which goes out to do him honor. But this would be but a poor way of showing either that we truly lament the dead — or really honor the living. And after all, the question, What will it profit me? is not the question on which God would have our religious duties turn — but, How shall I bring glory to Him, and live as His faithful and true servant?

Never go to the Sanctuary with itching ears in the hope of hearing something new, something that will please and excite you — but go there to pray and draw near to God. Go there to place yourself in the very presence of God — to praise Him, to adore Him, to worship Him. And remember that your bearing in the House of God has its influence on others. The conduct of one really devout and earnest person will have a blessed effect on the worshipers around him. It will tend to make others devout and earnest also.

Lastly, be very watchful. Indeed I know nothing which needs more close watchfulness than our church-going.

God is there to bless us. He stands with open hands, offering us His bounteous gifts. Christ is in the midst of our assemblies, as the great Intercessor, ready to intercede for us, to carry the prayers and praises from our poor lips to His Father's ear, and adding the priceless value of His own merits to our feeble cries!

Ah, but there is another present, watching every avenue by which he may dart into our minds some worldly, trifling thought; bent upon spoiling our devotions, and robbing us of that comfort and peace which God promises to the true worshiper. Before you go then, and while there, 'Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation;' for though the spirit may be willing, the flesh is miserably weak. May God ever bless to you the Services of His Church; and especially that richest and best of all, in which we commemorate the dying love of our blessed Lord. May you ever find in that sacred ordinance the comfort, the strength, and the refreshment which you long for! May it be a time to you of refreshing from the presence of the Lord — so that as you return from it you may be able to say, 'I sat under his banner 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!'

03.17. The Touchstone Of Acceptable Worship

17. The Touchstone Of Acceptable Worship

(continued) In the last chapter I confined myself to the inquiry, 'What should we go to the House of God for?' And I showed you that the purpose for which we go there is to draw near to God with our Confessions, our Supplications, and our Worship, or Homage; and further, to receive at the mouth of God's Minister the Message which He is pleased to send us. In the present chapter we are to make the following inquiries:

'What should we bring with us to the House of God?'

and 'What should we carry away?'

'What should we bring with us to the House of God?' In one sense we need bring nothing but our own emptiness — for our errand here is to obtain a gift, rather than to bring one. We should come like the impotent folk to Bethesda's Pool, that we may be healed of our spiritual infirmities by the waters of life; or like the multitude in the wilderness, to be fed by the Savior's hand. But yet, when we come to God's Ordinances, much depends upon the spirit in which we come. What is a rich feast to one — may afford no nourishment to another. The person who comes to church as he would go to any other place — will be very apt to miss the blessing which his heavenly Father has to give him, and will return with his heart untouched, and his soul unfed. While he whose mind is rightly ordered, whose look is upward, and whose heart, like the breathless stag, 'pants after the waterbrooks,' 'thirsting for God, the living God' — will not come in vain. Such a one, God loves to bless; and while He sends the rich empty away, He satisfies the longing soul, and fills the hungry soul with goodness.

First then, if you desire the Services of the Sanctuary to be really profitable, it is necessary that you should bring with you a prayerful and devout spirit. Our business there is with a prayer-hearing God. We come, as I have already shown you in my last chapter . . .

to confess our sins to Him;

to seek a blessing from Him for our needy souls;

to praise Him for His great and varied mercies;

to worship Him with our adoring hearts.

What great need then have we to be prepared for so important a work, to have our hearts tuned for so sacred an employment, and to have the world driven out of our thoughts! For how can we expect our minds to be in a fit state to hold fellowship with God — if we rush into His presence fresh from our worldly occupations, and with worldly feelings still clinging to us?

Before coming then to the House of God, and before you leave your own house — I would advise you to spend a few moments in prayer. Kneel down, and ask God to give you that preparation of

heart, which you so much need. Ask Him to give you a devout spirit, to keep your mind from wandering, and to raise it up to higher and holier things.

Secondly, it is important to bring with you a spirit of reverence. It has been remarked that the highest type of reverence is that which was seen in the Cherubim around the throne, veiling their faces as they chanted God's praises. I am afraid it must be admitted that the tone and temper of the present day is somewhat irreverent. It extends to all subjects. It has been well remarked, that he who has not reverence for divine things, will have but little for human things. Irreverence in religion, breeds irreverence in ordinary life. But this spirit of reverence should especially be seen in the Sanctuary. There we are in the presence of a holy God. He is everywhere, but especially in the assemblies of His saints. When Moses drew near to the Bush in Horeb, he was charged to take off his shoes, for it was holy ground — God was there. And so He is in His Sanctuary. Endeavor then to realize His presence. Remember that it is the House, the Palace, the Presence Chamber of the Great King. We should 'keep silence before Him.' The friendly greeting, the words of kind and Christian courtesy, should be reserved until we have left His courts. The habit which prevails in our churches of offering up a few secret words of prayer on entering, and of pausing for a while for a similar purpose after the Blessing has been given at the close — is very conducive to this reverential spirit. Our practice too of devoutly kneeling when we offer up prayer is no small help to our devotions. I would not only advise all my hearers to kneel — but I would go further, and recommend those of you who are able, not to indulge in that kind of compromise which some make between sitting and kneeling, a posture which is neither one thing nor the other. This was certainly not the posture which David intended when he exclaimed, 'O come, let us worship and bow down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker.' Neither can we imagine this to have been the posture of our Lord, when, in the garden of Gethsemane, He poured forth those words of earnest supplication to His heavenly Father. Nor again, if we picture to ourselves a Criminal condemned to death, can we suppose for a moment that he would use an attitude of ease in falling down before the Judge, and entreating him in mercy to reverse the fatal sentence. No, it would be the real kneeling of a suppliant. And this is the posture that I would recommend to you, unless you are prevented by old age, or by bodily infirmity, which would of course render it impossible. In saying this however let me remind you that as much as there is in a devout posture — it is nothing without a humble and devout heart. A devout heart however, and a reverential frame, generally go together — the one helping the other. For if we kneel — it will help to keep us in a prayerful spirit; and if we have a prayerful spirit — we shall assuredly be constrained to kneel.

Thirdly, it is important to bring with you a humble and teachable spirit. Do not criticize God's minister who leads you in prayer. Whether his reading be too fast or too slow for your taste, whether he performs his task well or ill — accept it; and let it not interfere with your devotions. Satan will greatly rejoice, if he can thus disturb your prayers, and lead you away from the one great object for which you come. And when the Preacher addresses you, think not of his manner, or his action, or the language with which he clothes the truth of God — but feel that it is a heavenly message which he is sent to deliver to you. Say within yourself, as Cornelius and his companions said to Peter, 'We are all here present before God to hear all things that are commanded you of God!' Remember that your Minister is Christ's ambassador — and therefore receive from him with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your soul.

There is just now too much of sensationalism and excitement among us, and not enough of sober earnestness. Is it not the case that when a celebrated Preacher is expected in any of our churches, many will forthwith leave their own congregation, with whom they usually worship, and flock to hear him? And what is worse — if an eccentric Preacher were advertised — a man who was known to step a little out of the common path — who was in the habit of saying startling things to attract or amuse his hearers — a man who had some peculiarity either of manner or of gesture — this would be quite enough to gather a crowded audience. But how sad that it should be so! Are we mere children, whose imaginations need to be excited? Is religion a plaything with us? Do we mistake God's house for a place of entertainment? Do we go there to be amused? Or do we not rather go there as poor and helpless sinners — needing to be taught, and guided, and strengthened on our difficult road to Heaven?

Ah, it was not without a meaning that Jesus said, 'Take heed how you hear.' You hear, not merely for the passing moment — but for eternity. You hear, not merely to gratify your taste, or to satisfy a morbid craving — but you hear that your soul may live.

Let me then repeat to you what I have said. We should bring to the House of God . . .

a prepared heart,

a reverential frame, and

also a humble and teachable spirit.

I will now say a few words as to what we should carry away with us from the House of God.

Remember, Public Worship is not the end — but the means. When a person comes to church, something is gained, but not everything. He has put himself in the way of good — but he himself may have received no good. Though he has been near to Jesus — he may not have touched even the hem of His garment. Though he has been to the banqueting-house — his soul may still starve. But if our attendance here has been blessed of God — if our worship has been profitable — if it has been something more than an outward form — something deeper, truer, and more spiritual — then . . .

we shall carry away a vast blessing with us;

we shall be holier and better;

we shall feel all the week a fuller sense of God's presence;

we shall be brought so much nearer to Him —

and this will have a sanctifying influence on our whole lives. The true Christian worshiper will carry out in the world — what he has learned in the Church. He will go and live every day a Christian life, and thereby show the power which religion exerts on his heart and conduct. If we are . . .

no better for our Prayers and our Ordinances,

no holier in our daily lives,

no more upright in our dealings than mere men of the world,

no more truthful and reliable than others —

then is there something wrong with us, and our church-going has been a mere form without any substance!

It is well to ask ourselves, and that most solemnly: Are we living Christians? Is Christ formed within us? Are we constrained by His love, and influenced by His grace — to live no longer to ourselves, but to Him? Have we ever drawn near to God — and are we living a life of faith on Him?

Oh, see that your worship, your prayers, your hearing of the gospel, your reception of Christ's ordinances — are having a real effect upon you, and are working the work of God within you. When the Jewish Lawgiver came down from the Mount, there was a holy radiance on his person, for he had been in company with God. And when the Disciples had been holding communion with their Lord, it was clear to the world that His blessed influence was upon them. Men 'took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus.' Just so, our approaches to God in Public Worship, and especially when it is enriched by the Holy Supper of the Lord — should have a marked effect upon us, an abiding influence on our everyday life. It should be a great help to us on our heavenward journey, a satisfying well, as we pass through the Valley of Baca on our way home to God. And when we reach that home, and are received into the Church above — what then? How will it be with us? We shall need no ordinances, no times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord — for He will be always with us — our Sun, our Shield, our Guide, our Teacher, our Portion, the bounteous Giver of every blessing. Then Two, at least, of the features which predominate in our earthly services will be no more needed. There will be no more need of Confession — for sin will be unknown in Heaven. And there will be no more Supplication — for all our needs will be abundantly satisfied. But we shall still praise God — yes, with a heartier voice than ever — and we shall worship, or pay homage, to Him who has loved us, and redeemed us, saying, 'Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power — be unto Him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, forever and ever!'

I cannot better close this chapter than by giving you six plain directions which I lately met with.

First, Try to understand the Prayer-book. Study it carefully, and get the right meaning and spirit of our various Services.

Secondly, Join heartily and audibly in the Responses. Do not be afraid to speak out. The Amens in the ancient Church, we are told, 'used to sound like a clap of thunder.'

Thirdly, Take your Bible with you to church; follow the reading of the Lessons — and read the text of the Sermon.

Fourthly, Take a warm and hearty part in the Singing. If you have a good voice, use it to the glory of God.

Fifthly, Go to the house of God in a spirit of prayer. Go in a teachable frame of mind, anxious to appear before God. Go with all your sins, and all your troubles — and leave them at the feet of Jesus. Seek to know Him, and to love Him, as the Refuge of your soul.

Sixthly, Be careful lest the devil should pluck the good seed out of your heart before you get home. Think over, talk over, and above all pray over — what you have heard.

03.18. The Touchstone of FITNESS FOR GOD'S KINGDOM

18. The Touchstone of FITNESS FOR GOD'S KINGDOM To belong to God's Kingdom here on earth, and to have part in that future Kingdom which is eternal — requires indeed a peculiar fitness. Let us apply the Gospel Touchstone, and test it, so that there shall be no mistake. The Religion of Christ, or His present Kingdom, does not consist in mere ordinances — and yet it has much to do with them. Every Institution is bound together by certain outward ties, and is regulated by external laws. All these however may be strictly observed — and yet the great object of the Institution may entirely fail. An Army, for instance, has its proper organization. Each Regiment has its distinctive uniform — and each Soldier is bound to conform to the special regulations, and submit to the special discipline, of his corps. These are all important for the well-being and efficiency of an Army — and yet they are not everything — for boldness, and courage, and skill are also needed, or that Army will win no battles. And so it is with the Church of Christ. Every Church has its own forms, and rules, and ordinances; and if we are true members we shall obey them, feeling that they are a great help and benefit to us. For example, the Church summons her children to Morning and Evening Prayer. Many come, and perhaps are none the better. It is an empty form to them, which they go through, and to very little purpose; and yet to others it is blessed — unspeakably blessed.

Now, these are not useless observances — far from it. They may greatly conduce to our spiritual growth and well-being. But religion does not consist in the most exact and punctual practice of them. There is something inner, deeper, and more vital. They are helpful to the growth of our inward life — but they are not the life itself. They are as the scaffolding, which assists us in the erection of the building — but they are not the building itself. They are as the blade, and the stalk which sustains the corn — but they are not the corn itself. With regard then to the externals of the Church, we should remember that they may conduce to our religious life, but they are not religion itself. Certain Doctrines and Ceremonies may commend themselves to one Christian, but not to another. 'All things (says the Apostle) are lawful, but not expedient' — expedient perhaps for one, but not for another. We should bear in mind, that after all 'the kingdom of God is not food and drink' — it does not consist in attention to Outward Forms, but in something of far greater importance, namely, 'righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.' In other words, it consists in that holiness of heart and life which marks God's true people, with its accompaniments of peace and joy within. Such is the portion of those who have by faith realized their high position as His disciples. But as regards the future, our fitness for God's presence is described in various ways. I can hardly however do better than take the graphic description which our Lord Himself gives in His Parable of the Marriage Supper. He there speaks of a certain 'Wedding Garment,' which was required of every guest who was permitted to take part in that Heavenly Feast.

Now what was that fitness described by being clad in the Wedding Garment? Some consider it to mean Personal Holiness; and others, the Righteousness and merit of Christ. Here is a little difficulty — but it is not one that need seriously trouble us, so long as we are content and take a

simple, childlike view of our Lord's teaching.

Jesus describes a certain King who had made a Feast. He sends out his usual invitations to the guests. But they, many of them, refuse to come, pleading one excuse and another for their refusal. He then sends his messengers in another direction, bidding those to his banquet who had hitherto been passed by.

Presently the supper-room being filled — he goes in to take a view of those who were gathered; and among them he discovers one clothed in an unsuitable dress, unlike the rest, and without the wedding garment, which was required of all. This person had evidently mingled with the assembled throng, and had hoped to pass unnoticed. With regard to this Wedding Garment, it may be observed that in the East long white robes were usually worn at public festivals; and those who appeared on such occasions with any other garments were excluded. There is a passage in the Old Testament, to which our Lord seems here to allude. It is in Zephaniah 1:7-8. The Prophet there says, 'The Lord has prepared a sacrifice, he has bid his guests. And it shall come to pass in the day of the Lord's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel.' The Person who invited the guests prepared such a garment for each to be worn on the occasion. These garments, called Caftans, were ready in the house, and were given out by the ruler of the feast to all who applied for them. To refuse then to wear such a dress, would be deemed an insult; and therefore the conduct of the person mentioned was inexcusable. The object of the Parable is clear. It reminds us that the Lord has provided a great blessing for His people; but for admission to the enjoyment of this blessing something more than a mere outward profession was required — a certain fitness, which is here represented by the 'Wedding Garment.' And what is that fitness? Certainly nothing of our own — for there is no clothing which we possess, that can make us worthy of such a privilege — no clothing, which will serve to fit us for the courts of heaven — no clothing of our own texture, which can bear the scrutiny of Him 'who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.'

There are four things which we need, each one of us — and without these we can never be admitted into Heaven. We may pass muster in the Church below without them — but we can have no place in the Church above.

First, we need Forgiveness, the complete blotting out of past and present sin, the payment of every debt which can be charged against us. We cannot for a moment imagine the possibility of a single unforgiven one sitting down to 'the marriage supper' in Heaven. He would be a black sheep in the midst of that spotless flock, a conscience-stricken and uneasy member of that peaceful, happy throng. The existence of even one unpardoned sin is enough to mar our happiness here, and would be fatal to our bliss hereafter. Surely, if we desire to be at peace with God, and to live a happy life, there must be no cloud intervening between Him and us. Our first step then must be to obtain forgiveness — and this can only be through the atonement made upon the Cross, and purchased for us by the Son of God; 'in whom (as the Apostle says) we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace'

What a blessing it would be if we could, all of us, realize this priceless boon — if we could take to ourselves those words of mercy, 'Your sins be forgiven you; go in peace.' There would be a weight off our minds, and an unspeakable relief to our souls. Go, dear reader, and tell God in how many ways you have offended Him. Tell Him that sin makes you unhappy. Kneel down and mention to

Him every sin that distresses you; and entreat Him to look upon you in mercy, and wash away your guilt. Let your language be that of the Psalmist, 'Pardon mine iniquity, for it is great.' Oh, beseech Him to remove the heavy burden from your soul, and make you to feel the blessedness of the man 'whose unrighteousness is forgiven, and whose sin is covered.' But we further need Acceptance with God. To be forgiven is an unspeakable blessing, but something more is required for our complete happiness. An offending slave may be forgiven, but he will still remain at a distance from his master. He will still look up to him with fear, and his life will be one of drudgery. But to be admitted into God's friendship — to be adopted as His child — to be brought into a state of reconciliation with Him — this is happiness indeed, a happiness too which you and I may enjoy. Whether the world prospers with us, or not; whether it smiles upon us, or frowns; whether earthly joy or sorrow is our portion — all is well, if we can but feel that God is our God, and that we are His children.

I lately received a letter from a person, a very true Christian, who had just undergone one of the most painful operations possible. For six long days and nights he was in excruciating agony, his bodily suffering being such that he was unable to speak, or think, or pray. All he could do was to endeavor quietly and submissively to endure the trial he was passing through. And yet he was kept in peace; for he felt that he was accepted through God's mercy, and that the Savior who loved him, and gave Himself for him, was very near to him. There was something real in this, and something which repaid him for all that he endured. And why have not we the same peace? Why is it that any of us remain at a distance from God — when we may be so near to Him? Why is He a stranger to us, when He offers Himself to us as our Father and our Friend? His arms are at this moment stretched out to receive us — and it is only our unbelief that keeps us from His bosom. 'You will not come to me, that you might have life.' But the true believer is indebted to his Savior for yet another and a higher blessing. Not only did Christ stand in the sinner's place when He died upon the Cross, paying every debt for us at the cost of His own blood — not only did He procure pardon for us, and open a way for our acceptance — but He made over to us His very Righteousness, handing over as it were His merits, and placing them to our account. Thus Paul says, 'He was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him;' and again he says, 'As by one man's disobedience (by Adam's disobedience) many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one (by the obedience of Christ) many are made righteous.' And this truth is repeated in one of our Articles (the eleventh), which says, 'We are accounted righteous (not only forgiven, but actually accounted righteous) before God only from the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ by faith, and not for our works or deservings.'

Here is a blessed exchange! Our unrighteousness is put away for the Savior's sake, and His righteousness is imputed to us, or reckoned as ours. Such is the glorious privilege to which every true child of God is admitted! But the saving grace, which our Lord has by His merits procured for us, does not exclude us from the part which we are to take in the work of our salvation. It is true that, if we are saved — it is God's work from first to last. If we obtain eternal life — it is His gift. But then there is a great and important work to be accomplished in our own souls — not only a work to be done for us, but also within us. The two beautifully blend and harmonize together. When the sinner obtains pardon and acceptance in Christ, and a better righteousness than his own in which to appear before God — he experiences at the same time such a change within which fits him for God's service here and God's presence hereafter. He becomes . . .

a changed man,
a new creature,
a hater of sin, and
a lover of holiness. And now it is his one great desire . . .
to grow up into God's likeness,
to walk in that narrow path which He has marked out,
to do His will, and

to adorn the doctrine of his Savior in all things. And if, as I said just now, we cannot for a moment conceive the possibility of an unforgiven one in Heaven — neither can we imagine it to be possible for an unholy one to be there. No. There must be a holiness of heart and character — or we cannot be fit for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Now then I think we are prepared to give an answer to the question, What is 'the Wedding Garment,' in which the heavenly Guest must be clad? It, is not pardon only; it is not acceptance only; it is not the imputed righteousness of Christ only; neither is it personal holiness alone — but all combined. These, these together, are the wedding dress, the complete attire, in which we must appear before God. Without it, we may be among the many called — but not among the few chosen. Without it, we may have our standing within the precincts of the outer fold, but never enter its sacred enclosure; we may be members of the Church on earth — but form no part of the general assembly and Church of the firstborn which are written in Heaven.' And now I will ask you to pause for a moment before the subject is dismissed, and this last chapter closed. The great King has sent out His message of loving invitation to all classes among us. There are some in the world, whom this invitation has not yet reached: they have never heard of Christ, or of the Feast which He has prepared. Others have heard it — but have deliberately rejected it. How is it with you? Your ears have been gladdened with the joyful sound — has your soul been gladdened by its reception? Christ's Messengers have come to you, offering you salvation. Have you thankfully and cordially accepted it? Perhaps you have treated the Messenger with kindness — but have put aside, for a time at least, the reception of the message.

Oh, hesitate no longer. If Christ may be yours; if Salvation may be yours; if the Wedding Garment is all ready for you — then decide today, and put in your claim for them. Apply for pardon, a present pardon. Give yourself to Christ, who is ready to receive you. Lay yourself out for a holy, useful, and happy life. Live no longer to yourself, but to God. Ask Him to give you His Holy Spirit to dwell within you, and to conform your life and character to His most blessed image, that you may become holy as He is holy. Whatever you know to be wrong, and whatever hinders you in your Christian course — put it away at once, and declare plainly that you seek a better country, even a heavenly one. Or if you are already His, try to walk more closely with Him. Try to live a yet higher Christian life. Live more by faith — and less by sight. Live for Heaven. So long as you are here, seek to be useful, and while blessed yourself, to be made a blessing to others.

If then I were to draw the portrait of one fit for God's heavenly kingdom, I would describe him as a soldier having on 'the whole armor of God,' or as a guest clad in 'the wedding garment' — as a

pardoned sinner — an adopted and accepted son — as one accounted righteous for the Savior's sake, and progressively made righteous through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit — waiting for, and ready for, the summons of his Lord, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father — inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world!'

S. Life in Heaven!

Life in Heaven!

Ashton Oxenden, 1882

Fifty years hence — where shall you and I be? We shall probably have passed away from this world. Our places will be filled by others. Our houses will be occupied by other tenants. Another set of faces will be seen in our village or our town. Where shall we be? 'In our graves,' you will say. Yes, our bodies will be there, but not our souls. They can never die. They are immortal. Those who have lived here without God, and without hope — will be living still without Him in Hell, and hopelessly banished from His presence. But those of us who have been living that Christian life — that spiritual life of which I have spoken so often in the foregoing chapters — they will be still living that very same life which was begun here, but which will then be perfect and unbroken through eternity!! The Christian Life in Heaven — this is the closing subject of my Book.

O my God, if no good has been received from any of these chapters, bless this at least to the Reader. Or, if You have made them useful to anyone, oh grant a double blessing to these remaining words.

I shall speak of the Christian life in Heaven:

I. As a life of Service.

II. As a life of Holiness.

III. As a life of Happiness.

IV. As a life of a blessed Companionship.

V. As a life of Endless Duration.

I. The Christian Life in Heaven is a life of SERVICE. When John speaks of the happy world above, he says, 'There shall be no more curse — but the throne of God and the Lamb shall be in it — and His servants shall serve Him!' Blessed be God, He allows us now to serve Him. If we are His people, our delight is to do His will. But oftentimes, when the spirit is willing — the flesh is sadly weak. Oftentimes we grieve to think that our hands are so feeble, and our hearts so cold. Our zeal flags. Our spiritual desires are checked. We grow faint and weary in well-doing. But in Heaven there will be no sins to hinder us — and no infirmities to weaken us!

Imagine what the service of the Angels must be. How readily and cheerfully they obey the summons of their Lord. Is there work to be done? Their language is, 'Here am I, Lord — send me.' Is there some relief to be given, some comfort to be carried, to one of God's suffering people? Their delight is to be the messengers and carriers of His mercy. 'Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to those who shall be heirs of salvation?' We know not how they help us — but they do help us — and not one is ever backward to perform his errand .

Now, this may give us some idea of the spirit in which our work will be done in Heaven. We know not what that work will be — but this we know, that God will ever have some holy, happy work for His people to perform. We shall enter upon our rest — and yet rest not day nor night. Our labors will be at an end — and yet we shall labor still. There will be work to do in God's Church above. There will be a choir of heavenly singers — and every voice and every heart will be in tune. There will be a glorious band of worshipers — and their thoughts will never wander, or their devotions flag. We shall be employed to carry out God's will in ways that we have no idea of now. Some think that many of those glittering stars we see, and their worlds, are filled with inhabitants. And perhaps God may have a message of mercy for us to carry to those worlds. Who knows? Who can say what blessed work the Lord may have in store for His gathered ones in Heaven? This we know, that the Christian Life there will be one of Service.

II. It will also be a life of HOLINESS. God's command to us now is, 'Be holy, for I am holy.' 'Be followers of God, as dear children.' 'Be therefore perfect, as your Father in Heaven is perfect.' But how miserably small is the degree of holiness which any of us reach! There are times when we grow, like plants in the garden of the Lord. We advance in grace, under the fostering care of the heavenly Gardener. But how constantly is our growth checked. How often are our leaves withered, and our blossoms nipped. How often does the cold blast of temptation fall upon us, and drive us back from the point which we had gained. 'Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect' — this is the constant complaint of the holiest Christian. But in Heaven it will be very different! We shall carry no body of sin with us there. Flesh and blood cannot enter there. There will be no more curse, no evil, no corruption, no infirmity, in that unfallen world. We shall all bear the image of God — we shall all be like Christ. Our love which is now so feeble — will be strong. Our faith, which is now so mixed with unbelief — will be pure and perfect. Our humility, which is often so spoiled by the creeping in of pride — will be the humility of a lowly but rejoicing heart. To know the will of God, to feel that our wills are in complete harmony with His, and to be ever doing not our will, but God's — this will be our delight!

Tell me, are you not constantly made sad by the risings of a sinful nature within you? When you would do good — evil is present with you. Are you not often reminded that you are still a prisoner here, tied and bound by the chain of your sins? Ah, the prison-door will soon be thrown open! Your prison dress will soon be laid aside. You will soon pass through the outer ward. You will soon breathe a purer air. You will soon gain your liberty, 'the glorious liberty of the children of God.' When the King comes in to see His guests, there will be none, not one, who does not have on the wedding garment. 'These are those who came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' 'They are without fault before the throne of God!'

III. But let us think of the life in Heaven as one of HAPPINESS. Holiness and happiness are twins — they cannot be separated. Where there is true holiness — there must be true happiness.

There are many questions concerning Heaven which we cannot answer. Where will it be? We cannot tell you; for God has not revealed it. It may be far away in some distant planet. It may be here in this very world of ours — purified and fitted for our eternal residence.

What shall we be like in Heaven? What language shall we speak? We know not; and never shall we know, until we reach our Father's presence.

Never until then shall we know where Heaven is, or what it is. Nor does it matter. For if God spared not His own Son to redeem us — then nothing will be lacking to make us supremely happy. The Home of the Redeemed, the House of 'many mansions,' the Palace of the Great King — has joys which eye has never seen before, nor ear ever heard, and which it has not entered into the heart of man to conceive! Who can tell the blessedness of a ransomed soul when it reaches Heaven? We read that 'to die is gain' — not shall be gain at some future time, after a certain delay — but to die is gain — immediate gain. There is but one step — and the soul is in glory. Before the sounds of mourning have subsided in the chamber of death — the song of the upper sanctuary has begun. There is no delay — no waiting for an escort to conduct us along that untrodden path. On angels' wings, in angels' arms — Lazarus is borne to Abraham's bosom. The pardoned thief was that day 'with Christ in paradise.'

What makes God's people unhappy here on earth? What brings a cloud now and then over the brightness of our sunny life? What makes the rejoicing heart sometimes fall back into sadness? The presence of sin — but there shall be no more sin there. The assaults of the Tempter — but he cannot reach us there.

Doubts and misgivings as to our acceptance — but there shall be no more then. The trials of life — but they will be ended.

Affliction, pain, sickness — but these will be unknown in Heaven.

There is another thing too which sometimes distresses us; and that is our ignorance. There are some things in God's Word which we cannot understand, and many of the dealings of His providence perplex us. Now we see but dimly, as through a dark glass — but soon we shall see clearly. 'Now I know in part, but then shall I know even as I am known.' Who can tell the exceeding joy of having . . .

everything cleared up;

every mystery of His inscrutable Providence made plain;

every tangled thread unraveled?

What a blessed study will the past be — to look along the whole line that we have traveled since our birth, and not only to see how step by step the Lord has led us — but also why He led us in the way He did . . .

why He thwarted our plans here — and made them succeed there;

why He directed us to one place — rather than another;

why He appeared to prosper us at one time — and to chasten us at another;

why He sometimes seemed to be our Enemy — rather than our Friend.

It will be joy indeed, when our minds are capable of taking all this in, when 'we shall know even as we are known.' But does not this tell us that there is a lesson for us now to learn? When you read God's Word, remember the feebleness of your knowledge, and that there are many depths which you cannot fathom. Be thankful for what is plain — and leave what is difficult to be cleared up in

Heaven. The Holy Spirit will meanwhile teach you all that you need to know — if you earnestly apply for His gracious help.

Try and feel the same too, with regard to the Lord's providential dealings with you. Be patient, O child of God; be submissive to your Father's will. Accept His darkest dispensations cheerfully, thankfully, without a murmur. 'Be still, and know that He is God.' Wait a moment, and the shadows will flee away, and all will be clear. What you do not understand now — 'you shall know hereafter.'

IV. Our life in Heaven will be a life of blessed COMPANIONSHIP. 'We shall be ever with the Lord!' Not only under His care, as we are now — not merely near Him, as we may be even in this world — but actually with Him. This was His promise, 'If any man serve me, let him follow me; where I am, there shall my servant be.' And this was His prayer, 'Father, I will that those whom you have given me, be with me where I am.'

Happy were those who walked with Him along the plains of Galilee. Happy were those who were His close companions, when He dwelt among us. Happy were those who shared His trials and His joys. Happy were those who, like Mary, sat at His feet, and heard His words. We may well envy them. But we shall enjoy a yet higher privilege — we shall be with Him in His own glorious and eternal kingdom! But we shall have other companions. And who will they be? The angels, who have never sinned. The multitude too, whom no man can number, of God's saved ones, 'having their Father's name written in their foreheads.'

Such will be our companionship. Are we beginning to enjoy it now? Do we love the Savior? Are His people dear to us? Are our hearts drawn towards them — the holier they are, the more heavenly-minded, the more Christ-like? Are our happiest hours those which we spend in the Lord's courts, and with His people? Then we have already something of Heaven about us. We have a pledge of that inheritance which will one day be ours!

5. Once more — the Christian Life in Heaven will be one of ENDLESS DURATION. Everything about this poor world is fleeting, changing, temporary. Everything about the future world is fixed, lasting, endless. Whatever portion is ours — it will be unchangeable, eternal. 'He who is unjust' now — will be 'unjust still;' and 'he who is filthy' now — will be 'filthy still.' And 'he who is righteous' now — will be 'righteous still.' Our state in the eternal world will never alter. In Hell, the gnawing worm of conscience will never die — the fire of torment will never lose a particle of its heat. And so too the joys of Heaven will be unceasing, always full, and always new. The pleasures at Christ's right hand will be for evermore!

Oh, the littleness of all earthly things! What is pain for a few weeks or months? What are the pleasures which this world makes so much of? What are riches, and honors, and greatness? They are 'but for a moment,' compared with the Christian's 'eternal weight of glory!'

Learn, oh learn it in time — that everything here is quickly passing away, and that everything in Heaven is forever. To be forever safe — forever happy — to be forever with those who have been our Christian brethren on earth — to meet them again, never to be separated — to be ever with the Lord Himself — this will be our blessed portion, if we are Christ's. But are we His? Have we 'passed from death unto life?' Have we washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb? Are we children of His household, and subjects of His kingdom? Is Heaven already begun in us?

I have spoken of our life in Heaven being one of service — are we delighting in the Lord's service now?

I have spoken of it as a life of holiness — is ours a holy walk now?

I have spoken of it too as a life of happiness — are we already happy in Christ? Have we found peace in Him? Our companionship will be with the Lord, and with His saints — are such our companions now?

It is a great mistake to look upon Heaven merely as a place of reward, a sort of new life altogether different from this. No, it will be our present Christian life carried on and perfected in a better world! It will be the transplanting of the fruitful tree — to another and a richer soil. It will be the calling up of the faithful servant — to a higher and more honored post. And now I have been graciously permitted to carry out my purpose, and to finish this little Book. Both you and I must give an account of it. May we do it with joy and not with grief! May the Lord bless you, and make you a blessing to others! We shall only be a little while longer here. Oh, that our lives may be happy and useful! Oh, that our passage through this world may be a blessed one, and that we may shine hereafter 'as the brightness of the firmament' and 'as the stars forever and ever!'

S. The Blessings and Trials of Sickness

The Blessings and Trials of Sickness By Ashton Oxenden, 1863

This little book is intended for those whom God has afflicted. My great aim is to show that sickness usually comes as a messenger of love; that it is sent to be a blessing, and may be made, by God's grace, a very great blessing to the soul.

If by my words any suffering brother or sister shall receive comfort, if any careless one shall become awakened, or if any weak believer shall be helped on his way to Heaven, my end will be gained.

I commend the following pages to the kindness and love of God; and pray that He may be pleased to use them for His own glory, and for the Reader's present and eternal good.

God's Purpose in Sending Sickness "Affliction does not come forth from the dust, neither does trouble spring forth out of the ground!" Job 5:6 "Just as a parent disciplines a child, the LORD your God disciplines you for your own good." Deuteronomy 8:5 "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness!" Hebrews 12:10 "I know, O LORD, that your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness You have afflicted me!" Psalms 119:75 The Writer of this Book feels for you in your present affliction, and desires to do you some good. Dear Brother or Sister, I have come into your sick-room, as it were, and wish to tell you a few things for your comfort and profit.

God has seen fit to stop you in the midst of your busy life, and to lay you aside for a while. It is not by chance that His afflicting hand has fallen upon you. It is not at random that He has chastened you. It may seem to be a mere accident that you are afflicted, and not another. But no; God has done it purposely! Not a sparrow even falls to the ground without our heavenly Father's ordering, and He prizes his redeemed children more than many sparrows.

Learn this then — that your present sickness or affliction is from God. It is His doing. He it is, who has brought this present chastisement upon you. And what are God's reasons for afflicting us? Is it to punish? Sometimes it is; but not, I think usually. "I have seen the wicked (says David) in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree" — prosperous and happy. And, on the other hand, do we not constantly see the righteous suffering under the heavy hand of God? Do not take, then, so sad and gloomy a view of affliction as this. There must be another and truer reason why the Lord chastens.

It is because He desires to do you some great good. The Gardener cuts and prunes his tree, to make it grow better, and bear more precious fruit; and God often uses His sharp knife for some gracious purpose. The wise and loving Father thwarts his child, and sometimes scourges it, for its good: and God uses His chastening rod for the very same reason. The skillful Physician, again, prescribes nauseous medicines to restore his patient's health: and God bids us take His medicines, though at the time they are very distasteful to us.

Now, the Gardener, and the Parent, and the Physician all wish to do good, either to the plant, or the child, or the patient. And so, depend upon it, God wishes to do us good. This is the great object of His corrections — to do us good in our latter end.

Here then is an answer to the question, Why does God afflict us? Because He loves us, and wishes to make us holy as He is holy, and happy as He is happy. For, as it has been well said, "Fiery trials make golden Christians."

It is most important to feel this — My God loves me, and therefore He afflicts me. If you can but realize this, it will turn your present chastisement into a blessing, and your sick-room into a little paradise! And remember, I am not going one step beyond Scripture; for is it not written there, "'As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline!" And again, "'For whom the LORD loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." God had one Son without sin, but He never had any son without sorrow.

There is another thing too, which I want you to bear in mind — that God cannot afflict wrongly. He never makes mistakes. Our earthly parents sometimes do. They chasten us sometimes (St. Paul says), "as they think best"; that is, without rhyme or reason, according to their own whims and fancies; "but He disciplines us for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness."

Before then you go a step further, ask God to convince you of this precious truth — It is my Father who corrects me, even He who loves me. I will receive this chastisement then from God, and remember that it is a loving hand that smites. I will kiss the very rod that scourges me. I will say, "Father, not my will, but may Your will be done. Make me what you would have me to be. Show me what you would have me to do."

God's Purpose in Afflicting You

You are convinced, I hope, that God chastens purposely and lovingly. Affliction comes from Him; and He afflicts, not as a stern Judge, but as a Father and a Friend.

If I have made this clear to you, I thank God for it; for thus I have given you a sort of foundation-truth, on which your happiness and profit at this season greatly depends. But now let us go a step further. You will naturally ask, Why does God afflict me? What is there in me that calls down His chastisement at this present time?

1. Perhaps you have hitherto been, like many others, unconcerned about your soul. You have gone on, from day to day, without any serious thought about the eternity which is before you. You have hitherto lived for the world, instead of living for God. I don't say that you have lived in willful sin. You may not have done this. But still you have lived too much as if this world was your home.

If so, your present affliction is sent to arouse you. Its voice is a voice of mercy, saying, "Awake, you that sleep, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall give you light." God sends it to alarm you, to disturb you, to quicken you. He seems to say to you, Are you prepared to meet your God? Have you pardon and peace in Christ your Savior? Is your soul saved?

Happy is it for you, if this affliction makes you consider, and if it leads you to think of the eternal world, which has been too much kept out of sight. Happy for you, if it makes you feel your great need of a Savior, and brings you as a penitent to His cross.

2. Or perhaps you are one who has at times some serious feelings. Eternity is something very solemn in your eyes. You feel yourself to be a sinner, and you know that your only hope of salvation is in Christ. But you have never given yourself heartily to Him. The world keeps you back. Or some secret sin, some little cherished sin it may be, stands like a strong barrier between you and God. Ah, you need decision. You want to break entirely with the world and sin, and to surrender your whole heart to the Savior. You are only an "almost Christian". You are not far from the kingdom of God — and yet you are not in it. You are near the door — but have never entered in. Do you not at once see then why God has afflicted you? It is to bring you nearer to Him. He would have you now see that a little religion will give you no comfort, and will bring no peace to your soul. It will not do for a sick-bed, and much less will it do for a dying hour.

There is a voice that whispers to you now, which calls to you with loving earnestness, "Why will you die? Why stand so far off, when you may draw near?" Jesus comes close to you as it were now, saying, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. I have knocked before by my Word, by my Spirit, by my Ministers. Now I knock still louder!" Oh say not, "Depart from me!" But rather say, "Abide with me, O my Savior. Pardon my past half-heartedness. Draw near to me, and bless me. Claim me as your own. Make me your forever."

3. Or, it is possible you may be a Backslider. Once you felt deeply. You were in earnest. Jesus was your delight. Your chief interest was in holy things. You loved God's Word and God's House. Prayer was your sweetest employment. The company of God's people was pleasant to you. But something happened, which turned you from this blessed path. You grew somewhat cold. The lamp burnt dimly within you. The world regained its power over you. Your language now is:

What peaceful hours I then enjoyed!

How sweet their memory still!

But they have left an aching void,

The world can never fill.

God might have left you in this state. But no; He loved you too well to do so. He now chastens you — and is it not in mercy? He may deal roughly with you; and would you not deal so with your dearest child or friend, if you saw them running into danger? I am sure you would. And so the Lord is forced to deal with you. Though you have acted treacherously towards Him, and "turned aside" from Him "like a deceitful bow," He still loves you, and will not let you perish, without sending after you His warning voice, and stretching out His arm to save you.

Oh make this illness a time for returning to Him whom you have forsaken. Think of God's great love in sparing you. Think of His kindness in making this gracious effort to bring you to Himself. He seems to say, "Return unto me, for I have redeemed you. My arms are still open to receive you. I have blessings, which may yet be yours!"

4. Once more. You may be a true Child of God, one whom He greatly loves, a precious plant over which He is watching with peculiar care. He sees you serving Him, and walking with Him, but He wishes your service to be a still more happy service, and your walk to be a closer walk with Him. The Refiner takes a piece of gold, and is not satisfied that it is in the ore. He takes means to make it more precious, by putting it into the furnace. Thus he purifies it, burns out every particle of dross

that was in it. Yes, and when he takes it out of the fire, he rejoices to see it so pure and bright, that it reflects his own image. And so it is with you, dear Christian Sufferer. God's promise is, "I will turn my hand upon you, and purely purge away your dross." "I will refine them, as silver is refined, and will try them, as gold is tried." Even the very best of us — how short we come of what we ought to be, and what we might be! Even the best of us — what need we have to be thus trained and disciplined for Heaven! No longer ask then, Why am I afflicted? But rather say, "Lord, let not my affliction be lost upon me! Accomplish in me your own most gracious purpose. May I come out of this furnace, as gold purified seven times in the fire."

How Affliction Should Be Received

Some receive affliction as if they deserved a different treatment from God. They murmur at it. It chafes and irritates them. Like "a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke," they will not bend their neck. This must be wrong; for shall we receive good at the hands of God, and not evil? If chastisement is our portion, must it not be well for us?

Others again receive it with unconcern, as something they must put up with as best they can. They look upon it simply as a misfortune, which is to be borne because it cannot be avoided. This too must be wrong. A true Christian will receive affliction with submission. It is his Father's doing; and therefore he quietly submits. It comes from Him, and must therefore be well. He feels that there is a needs-be for it. What a sweet pillow is this, on which to rest his weary head! He cannot, perhaps, see why it is needful; but he acknowledges that it must be right, and that what he "knows not now," he will "know hereafter." It is a voice of love; and he is ready to exclaim with Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening." I can give you no better prayer than that contained in the well-known hymn,

Renew my will from day to day,

Blend it with Thine; and take away

All that now makes it hard to say —

Your will be done.

We should receive our affliction too with patience. Paul says that "tribulation works patience." This ought to be its effect upon us; and this will be its effect, if God blesses it to us. Sometimes patience can be learned in no other school. We are taught in the chambers of sickness and suffering — what we cannot learn elsewhere. What precept and example fail to teach us, affliction sometimes will.

You are now called to patient, humble suffering. Others may be called to do much for God; you are called to suffer. Your duty is to be still. This is your work now. Your heavenly Father allots it to you. And, be assured, you may glorify Him quite as much by your patience, as you could do by the most active service.

Oh then, submit to this wholesome discipline; and pray that it may tame, and subdue, and chasten you — leading you to bear without a murmur whatever your heavenly Father shall lay upon you. Our affliction should humble us. The people of Nineveh humbled themselves in their trial. Job said, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor

myself, and repent in dust and ashes." David says, "I was silent, and opened not my mouth, for You are the one who has done this!" Even proud Nebuchadnezzar was for a while laid low. And we Christians are exhorted to "humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God."

Surely, if anything will bring down our high thoughts, and set us upon our right level, it is sickness. You may, perhaps, hitherto have prided yourself on your strength, or your appearance, or your abilities. What are they now that you are wasted by sickness? Or you have perhaps been inclined to boast of your learning. But can learning relieve your pains, or help you to meet death? It is utterly powerless on such occasions. Or, again, you may have been lifted up by riches. But how miserably poor we seem, when God's chastening hand is upon us! Fall down then before God, and say, "Naked came I into the world, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord!" But I must go even further still, and say, that a real Christian will receive his affliction with thankfulness — yes, even with thankfulness!

I doubt not but you now find it very hard to say, "Thank God for this trial." And yet you ought to say it: and perhaps the time will come when you will be able to say it from your very heart. And even before this sickness has left you, your happy experience may be, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted. Before I was afflicted I went wrong, but now have I kept Your Word." For the sake of those about you, as well as for your own sake, try and take your trial thankfully and cheerfully. Brighten up. There is good in store for you. Yes, it is even on its way to you, though you may not see it. This illness, or this misfortune, may prove to be among your richest blessings. Ask God to make it so; and then it will "yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness."

It has been said that there is a rough and a smooth side to every handle, and that we may take hold of things by either. It is good if you can get into the habit of always choosing the smooth side. And you will be able, if only you can believe that Word, which says that "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose!" Romans 8:28

There is a dark and a bright side to every providence, as there was to the pillar in the wilderness. We naturally fix on the dark side and call it sorrow; but faith sees a ray of light amidst the gloom, and forthwith our sorrow is turned into joy.

Though your sufferings may be great — think how many mercies you have. Think too, how many people suffer, even more than you do. Above all, think of Him who suffered so bitterly, but yet so cheerfully — and that for your sake — who said, as His darkest hour drew near, "The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?"

Ah, if Jesus is with you — if He "speaks peace" to your soul — your gloomy chamber will be lighted up, and a peace will be there which the world knows not of. How true it is that "afflictions are blessings to us — when we can bless God for our afflictions."

It was said of a young Christian sufferer that, "Notwithstanding the sadness of seeing her suffer, her room was the happiest place in all the house — the place where her sisters were sure to see the bright side of things, and to learn that to the thankful heart, mercies lie thickly strewn along the path of suffering."

Some murmur when their sky is clear,

And wholly bright to view,

If one small speck of dark appear

In their great Heaven of blue.

While some with thankful love are filled,

If but one streak of light,

One ray of God's great mercy, gild

The darkness of their night. The Duties of the Sick-room

"In the day of adversity (says Solomon) consider." This, my dear Friend, is "the day of adversity" with you. God has laid you aside for a while; and it is your duty to consider. In the days of your health, you were hurrying on perhaps a little too fast. God saw this, and in mercy stopped you. And now He bids you make this illness a kind of pause in your journey — a kind of halting place by the way — a time for "considering your ways," for buckling on your armor, and for making a new start heavenward. But let us come a little to particulars; for there are certain Duties which a time of sickness specially calls forth.

1. You have a favorable time now for the study of God's Word. Perhaps your Bible has been hitherto a book but seldom read. Take it down from your shelf, and open its precious pages. Do not look into it carelessly, as you have often done; but search it, as one seeking for a hidden treasure. It contains the words of eternal life — God's message to your soul — a remedy for all your spiritual needs. You have probably more spare time now than you ever had before. Spend much of it in the careful and prayerful reading of that Book, which is your guide to Heaven. Your time, if thus spent, will prove to be a time of unspeakable profit to you. And when you read, lift up your prayer to God, and ask Him for His blessing. Entreat Him to write His word in your heart, and to bring it home to your conscience. "Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your soul."

2. Welcome the visits of your pastor. God sends him to you: receive him as His messenger. Speak freely to him. Tell him the state of your heart, and ask him to guide and direct you. When he is gone, think much of the words that he has read or spoken to you. This is the way to make his visits profitable.

Some like their Minister to speak smooth things to them, so as not to disturb their peace. But is it not far better that our peace should be disturbed, if it is not resting on a right foundation? The Surgeon probes our wounds, and makes us flinch; but it is that he may heal us. And so must it be with our spiritual Physician. He may speak very home to us, and make our consciences smart; but no matter if it is to do our souls good. He tries perhaps to make us feel sorrow for sin — but why? It is that we may find joy and peace in Christ. Ask God then to make the visits of your pastor a blessing to you.

3. Give yourself much to Prayer. When health and strength were yours, and all seemed to go on smoothly, prayer was perhaps used merely as a form. You knelt down night and morning, but it was only as a habit. There was but very little meaning in your prayers. But this sickness has, I

trust, made you somewhat thoughtful. It has reminded you that you will not live always — that you may be nearer death than you supposed — that your days may be numbered.

Now is the time for prayer — for real heart-prayer. Oh, fall down upon your knees, and cry earnestly to God. Entreat Him to pardon the past — to give you the Holy Spirit in larger measure — to make you a true disciple of Christ — and, in short, to send you from your sick-chamber a thoroughly altered person. God speaks to you, as it were, in this your hour of sickness. And you will do well to speak much to Him. Tell Him all that you are, and all that you need; and beseech Him to mold you into His image, and make you what He would have you to be.

Let the time of sickness be with you a special time of prayer. Let the walls of your chamber bear witness to your earnest cries to Heaven.

4. Self-examination is another duty very suitable to a sick-bed, or a sickroom. Our hearts need looking into. Our secret motives need sounding. The inner chambers of our soul need searching out.

Very likely you have been in the habit of telling God in a general way that you are a sinner, and asking Him in a general way to forgive you. But this must not be all. We must bring each separate sin out of its hiding-place. We must know the turnings and windings of our deceitful and wicked hearts. Thus alone can we make any real conquest over our besetting sins, and make any real progress in grace. Deal faithfully with your own self. Find out your true condition before God. Say, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there is any wicked way in me — and lead me in the everlasting way."

I have one more duty to recommend.

5. Now is the time to make Good Resolutions. These are common enough in the hours of sickness. The heart is usually softened at such a time. The conscience is awakened. And we determine, if spared, to lead a very different life. But too often, when health returns, our resolutions prove to be like the morning cloud or the early dew, which soon pass away. There is hardly any one so bad, but he has at times resolved to be better. And we may say, with an old writer, that "Even Hell itself is paved with good resolutions!"

Ought we not then to make resolutions in our sickness? Certainly we ought. But our fault is, that we are apt to make them in our own feeble strength — and then they prove to be worthless. But if we distrust ourselves, and throw ourselves upon God's strength — if we are conscious of our weakness, and entreat the Lord to help us — then He will enable us to carry out our resolutions, He will grant us the needed strength, and will give us grace to go and sin no more.

Remember then, whatever you resolve to do, let it be done in simple reliance upon God's gracious help.

Difficulties in Prayer When we are in health, and especially if we are much taken up with worldly business, we are apt to imagine that the days of sickness are especially favorable to prayer. Is this the case? In some respects it is. For then we are called aside from the world, and we have ample time for serious thought, and for religious exercises. At such a season too the nearness of God, and of the unseen world, are forced as it were upon us. But who that knows what true prayer is, does not feel the difficulty, even then, of lifting up the heart to God? The world still presses its

claims upon us, though not in the same way that it did when we were in health. It comes rushing in upon us in some other shape. Even the sick-room is not beyond its reach. Satan too is as busy now as ever, plying his temptations, and taking every advantage of our weakness.

It sometimes happens that even real Christians feel prayer to be irksome. Our minds at times are sorely harassed by wandering and distracted thoughts. Or our souls feel dry and barren, and we are tempted to leave off praying. Prayer does not seem to open the gate of Heaven; and so we turn away from it, and give up knocking. At such times we should remember that, very likely, the prayers which cause us the greatest difficulty are the most acceptable to God. We should think of Jacob for our encouragement. He wrestled with the Angel, and said, "I will not let you go, except you bless me!" Or we may bear in mind the case of the Syrophenician Woman, who persevered in her petitions, until at length Jesus said unto her, "O Woman, great is your faith — be it unto you even as you will." As you lie upon your bed of suffering, or are confined to your chamber, bear in mind that there are difficulties — and you must make a deliberate effort to overcome them.

You need to have your special hours of devotion in sickness, quite as much as when you were well. It may be thought that as you have now so much leisure, this will be unnecessary. But sure I am, that if you have no fixed times for prayer, your devotions will be very desultory and pointless. A duty, which we imagine we may engage in at any moment, is sure to be badly done, if not left undone altogether. And again, now that you have so much time for drawing near to God, it will be very helpful to you to vary the subject of your prayers. For instance, at the beginning and close of each day, your prayers might be general. At noon you might pray especially for others — for your church, your minister, or any individuals whom you may desire to mention before God. For we must not think merely of our own needs and struggles: but we should remember the trials and difficulties and temptations of our brethren, and bear them on our hearts before the Throne of Grace. Then at some period in the afternoon, you might devote a time to prayer for a direct blessing on your affliction; and you might also couple with it Self-examination, specifying any particular sins which beset you, and any graces which are lacking in you. This would give a point and meaning to your prayers, which they would not otherwise have; and it would also make them far more interesting to you than they would otherwise be. But though it is very desirable to have stated times for devotion, yet, if your soul is spiritually alive, you will not be content with this. Just as when a Friend whom you really love is with you, you will not be satisfied with speaking to him at mealtime, or at other stated periods, but you will be constantly wishing to converse with him. So it will be with you, if you feel God to be your Father, and Jesus to be your Friend. You will be constantly longing to hold fellowship with Him who is so unspeakably dear to you. You will be constantly lifting up your heart to Him in short, broken prayers.

There are, be assured, "many hindrances in coming to the mercy-seat" — hindrances too from which you, my sick Brother or Sister, are by no means free. Be not cast down then, if you experience them. I have tried to give you a little help. But above all I would tell you that "The Holy Spirit helps our infirmities." Ask Him to afford you the needed assistance, to give you a prayerful frame of mind, and to teach you what to ask, and how to ask it.

Truly your sickness will not be in vain, if during the hours of confinement you gain this one good habit — the habit of prayer. It will grow upon you more and more. For a praying spirit, once formed during the season of illness, may become a blessed habit through life, never to be laid aside. The

Bible the Best Companion

There are many books which may be read with profit in the days of sickness. But there is one Book better than them all. I mean God's own Book, the Bible. Other books are from men: this is from God. And "who teaches like Him?"

Many a sick person wishes to read his Bible, but is a little perplexed, and scarcely knows when or where to begin. It may be said, Is not the Bible all profitable? Yes; but there are some parts of it more especially suitable to you in your present state.

I will take it for granted that you wish to profit by your illness; that God's Word is precious to you; and that you desire to make it your companion in your sick-room. Do not fall into the mistake of thinking it necessary to read a large portion of Scripture at a time. A little, read thoughtfully, and with earnest prayer for God's teaching, will be far more likely to feed and refresh your soul.

Sometimes, when you are able, it will be well to take a verse or two of Scripture, and turn it into prayer. This you will find very profitable to your soul; and it will help you greatly in raising your heart heavenward. For this purpose either the Psalms or the Epistles will be very suitable.

I well know however that a sick person often feels very weary, and scarcely able to read at all. At such times the effort of thinking is too great for the mind of one who is weakened by illness. If such is the case with you, my dear Friend, be not cast down. Your Father in Heaven is fully aware of your infirmity. He knows our frame, and remembers that we are but dust. He will accept a few broken sentences, or even a trustful look, instead of a regular prayer; and He will bless the reading of a few short words, and make them as food to your soul. May God's Word, whether read, or listened to, or treasured up in the storehouse of your memory, be very sweet to you in the time of your affliction! May it cheer many a lonely hour! And may your heart be so prepared by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, that you may feel as though God was Himself speaking to your soul, and pointing out to you the way to Heaven!

Prolonged Illness

Poor weary sufferer, long have you perhaps occupied this sick-room. Your little world has for many weeks or months been contained within the walls of your chamber. Like an imprisoned bird, your wings are clipped, and you are still forbidden to rove beyond your narrow cage. Lonely days and wearisome months are appointed you. Be it so. Since it is God's will, it is and must be well. "Even so, Father, for so it seems good in your sight."

Why has God sent you this long illness? He does not wish to weary you. He takes no pleasure in your sufferings. Does He not love you? And yet He has brought you into this state. Ah, is it not because He loves you, that He keeps you in it week after week?

Like a Father, He is chastening you, that you may be thoroughly weaned from the world, and may be made partaker of His holiness. A short affliction would not, in your case, accomplish the gracious work which He purposes to do; and so He lengthens out your trial. And, depend upon it, the day will soon come, when you will see that not one hour too long have you been kept here, and not one pain too many have you been called to bear. In your cup of suffering every drop has been carefully measured out by Him who cares for you. Be content then to lie passive in your Father's hands. Instead of desiring that His chastening rod may be removed one moment before the time,

rather ask that He will give you grace to bear your sufferings meekly, and that He will fully accomplish His great work in you. With regard to prayer, order and regularity are never more valuable than in a lengthened illness. And to prayer forget not to add the delightful work of praise. But, you may say, surely a prolonged time of sickness, and perhaps of suffering also, can hardly be a time for praise? Yes, it may be, and it should be. God is good to all, and we may thank Him for His goodness. Whom He loves He chastens; therefore thank Him for His love to you.

It often happens, as a Christian writer observes, that "when the heart is torpid and yields not to the action of prayer, it will begin to thaw with the warm and genial exercise of praise. For how much is there to kindle the heart in the very thought of praise! It is the pious exercise of Heaven. Nature is offering it unceasingly. The whole creation sends up one grand chorus of praise to the Throne of God. Then join in with your feeble voice. Let some note of thankfulness be sounded, even in the chamber of sickness. So too with regard to your Bible-reading. Not only let the study of God's Word be your chief employment, but read it on some fixed plan. Do not turn to it merely when you happen to be in the mood, or pitch upon a chapter at random, but read it according to some rule. For instance, you may take some Book out of the Old Testament in the morning, and read it through in order, and one out of the New Testament in the evening. Thus you will get to know much of the Bible; and you will take an interest in it, which you never felt before.

Let your Bible-reading be as one of your regular meals, which you cannot do without. Seek that your soul may be fed and nourished by it. "Your word have I esteemed (says David) more than my necessary food." Above all, whenever you open the Bible, lift up your heart for the teaching of the Holy Spirit; for without it all your reading will be in vain.

There is one thought which often distresses a confirmed invalid. I mean the thought that he is leading a comparatively useless life. Now, do not imagine that you must needs be useless, even though you may be stretched upon a sick-bed. Depend upon it, if God has a work for you to do for Him, He can enable you to do it wherever He places you. And undoubtedly He has a work for you to do, prisoner as you are. A Christian writer observes, "It may be God's will that our days may be passed upon a weary couch of pain — but still we need not be deprived of the heavenly joy of ministering. While a head to think, and a heart to care, are left to us, we may be planning for the spiritual welfare of some needy soul, and watering our plans with our prayers."

You may interest yourself in others, and do little acts of kindness towards them. You may have an alms-bag, or a missionary-box, by your bedside, and so collect little sums from those who visit you. You may speak a word in season, or you may let the light of your Christian example shine, so that all who come near you may see what Jesus is doing for you. You can pray for your fellow-men, whom you can reach by no other means. And who can tell what blessings you may bring down upon them by your earnest intercessions? And after all, a suffering child of God upon his sick-bed glorifies Him as much, by patient submission and resignation — as one actually engaged in more direct work for God.

Then, dear Friend, believe that your life, in this solitary sick-room, may be a very blessed life, a very peaceful life, yes, and a very useful life too. And truly, if you are Christ's servant, you may cheer yourself with the happy thought, that when a few more suffering days and restless nights are past, and a few more trials are undergone, then you will be beyond the reach of suffering, and enjoy that "rest which remains for the people of God." The Holy Communion Are you a

Communicant? I mean are you one who in the days of your health, loved to come to the Lord's table?

If you have hitherto lived in the neglect of this holy Ordinance, and imagine that the mere act of receiving it now will make all right, and set you fair on the way to Heaven, you are greatly mistaken. The Lord's Supper is no charm to fit us for death. It is no passport to Heaven. To look upon it in this light is to lower our Savior's blessed ordinance, and to encourage ourselves in disobeying His command. But if the Lord's Table is no new place to you — if in past days you have loved to be there — then most welcome are you now to this sacred Feast. You may, in this your day of suffering, "draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort." Or if, though once a neglecter of the Savior's ordinance, you have through illness been brought to sincere repentance — if the Holy Spirit has wrought within you a deep conviction of sin, and led you to the Cross — if you have heartily entered upon a new and holy path — the thought may well come into your mind: May I now enjoy a privilege which in the days of my health I so sinfully neglected? Yes, if your heart has become tender, and if you love your Savior, and feel an earnest desire to be His true and faithful servant — you are permitted to partake of this most precious means of grace. Jesus welcomes you to His own Feast!

Whether then you have long been walking in the ways of Christ, or have but lately entered upon His service — so long as you are now truly in earnest, and desire henceforth to lead a holier life, then I would say to you, in my Master's name, "Come, for all things are ready. Do this in remembrance of your Lord." This heavenly Feast is for the strengthening, feeding, and refreshing of your soul. And as you greatly need strength to help you on your way, and spiritual food to sustain you as you journey onwards, here in this Sacrament Christ is ready to give it to you; for He says, "My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed." And what a blessing to be permitted on your sick-bed thus to remember your suffering Savior, and to feed your hungry soul on Him!

Ask your Minister to explain any difficulty, or to clear up any doubt, which may trouble your mind. But above all, ask God to prepare you for this ordinance. Ask Him to give you a broken and contrite heart, that you may come as a penitent to the Cross. Ask Him to give you faith to believe in Christ, and to cast your whole soul upon Him. And ask Him to make His own Feast a very rich blessing to you.

Then I am sure that the Holy Communion will bring comfort to your soul, and help you on your heavenly way. Oh that you may derive much enjoyment from it, and may be able to say, "I sat under his shadow with much delight, and his fruit was sweet unto my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love!"

Near Home!

Perhaps the days of your illness are drawing to a close, and death with its rapid strides is approaching near to you. Perhaps something whispers in your ear that your end is near.

What a difference there is between the death-bed of a worldly person, for whom sickness has done nothing — and of one for whom it has been a blessed preparation for a world of holiness! The one will be uncheered and unblest, still far from God, and still without Christ. His bed of suffering will be changed for that gloomy prison-house, where the worm never dies. An eternity will open upon him, where the voice of mercy will no more be heard! But the Christian Sufferer who

has committed his soul to Christ — who has felt his sins to be a burden and a grief to him, and has found refuge in the Savior — who has "washed his robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" — who has been taught by the Holy Spirit, and has been brought under His sanctifying influence — to him death is as a welcome messenger. It is the gate through which he enters into glory. He is like a traveler, who has endured many a toil and many a trial; and now he is near his home — that peaceful home which Christ has prepared in His Father's house. My dear Brother, or Sister, look up, for "your redemption draws near!" Think of your sins so great and so many — and all atoned for — all forgiven! Think of your Savior, and all that He has done for you — how He has borne with your unbelief and hardness of heart — how He has welcomed you to His bosom, and received you, although the chief of sinners. And can you not trust Him now? Oh, believe on Him with all your heart. Cling to Him as the limpet clings to the solid rock. Let Him be everything to you — His blood your only plea — His righteousness the cloak to cover you — His atonement your only hope. Let Him be in your dying thoughts. Let His rod and His staff comfort you.

Think often of Heaven. Here on earth, you are but a stranger — there you will be at home. Here you have a suffering body — there there will be no more sin and no more pain. Here you are often cast down by the weakness of your faith, and the sinfulness of your heart. Here you have many a conflict and many a doubt, much darkness and ignorance. But there all will be peace; all will be light; we shall "know even as we are known." May your eye be fixed on Heaven, and may you be made daily more fit for the inheritance of the saints! Thank God for His past dealings with you; and trust Him, oh trust Him, for what is before you. May the last steps of your wilderness journey be safe and peaceful! May you "lean on your beloved"; and say in the humble confidence of an assured hope, "The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: and now there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness!"

Recovery; a Time for Encouragement and Caution

I will suppose that your illness has taken a favorable turn, and that, through God's mercy, you are now recovering. Your illness, whether long or short, is leaving you; and health is coming back, with its many duties, blessings, and dangers. The season of recovery is a critical season — and not only does it call forth our gratitude, but also our watchfulness. The illness which you have just passed through has, I trust, been blessed to you. It leaves you better than it found you — more thoughtful, more humble, more thankful, more holy, more in earnest.

You have formed many a holy resolution, which you thoroughly mean to carry out; and you have declared before God, that you will henceforth live to Him, and give yourself to His blessed service.

These resolutions were made in the hour of your affliction, when God's heavy hand was upon you. And do you repent having made them? I trust not. I would hope that you are really anxious, God helping you, to live much nearer to Him than you have ever yet lived; and that the desire of your heart is to be His faithful disciple. You are resolved to make a new start, and to live an altogether new life. And I promise you that, if these resolutions are kept, your course will indeed be a happy one, and you will forever thank God for having chastened you, and thus brought you to Himself. But remember that your best resolutions will be worthless, and will fall to the ground, if they are made in your own strength. Even Paul felt that he needed greater power than he himself possessed; for he says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthened me."

Let me then remind you, dear Friend, that in yourself you are powerless. The strength you need must come from above. It is God alone who can "work in you to will and to do his good pleasure." Never forget this. You must throw yourself upon God, entreating His gracious help, and that help will most assuredly be given to you. But there is another caution I must give you. During the weeks that are past you have been much in your sick room. You have been much alone. The world has for a time been shut out. But now you are going to plunge into it again; and Satan will try hard to make you forget your illness, your resolves, and the great mercies which God has shown you. He will whisper in your ear, "Death is no longer hovering over you — it is afar off. You may enjoy a little more of the world yet, and there will be ample time to think of religion."

Then again, there will be many who will try to persuade you that the Christian life is a hard and gloomy one. They will laugh at your pious feelings, and perhaps endeavor by persecution to turn you from the right path.

Now, it is well to be prepared for both these trials, for they will surely come. Remember, Satan desires to have your soul; and the more in earnest you seem to be, the more desperate will be his efforts to draw you from your steadfastness. And as for persecution — it is nothing more than the Christian's portion. For, does not the Word of God say that "those who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." And again, that "we must through much tribulation enter the kingdom of God." If you would gain the victory — you must fight the battle. If you would overcome — you must bear the Cross. But oh, how small these difficulties will seem, if God is on your side, and if Christ undertakes for you. On leaving your Sick Room then —

1. Expect to meet with difficulties. None of us can win Christ without many an effort. None of us can reach Heaven without many a trial by the way. Do not flatter yourself that the path will be smooth and easy. "The kingdom of Heaven" says our Lord, "suffers violence, and the violent take it by force."

2. Go forth in the strength of the Lord. Conscious of your own weakness, be ever looking to Him for help. Lean upon His arm, and He will uphold you. Trust Him, and all will be well. Hear His loving promise, "My grace is sufficient for you; for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

3. Be decided for Christ. There are many half-hearted, undecided ones in the world; many who set out for Heaven, but never reach it; many who have pious feelings and promise well, but fail for lack of courage and decision. They are always wishing to be better, and hoping one day to be more in earnest; but they never surrender their whole hearts to Christ, and therefore they are never really His. A decided course is far the easiest. Let the world see that your face is set heavenward — and half your difficulty is over. Be content to lose your character with worldly people. Declare plainly that you seek a better country, a heavenly one. This will make your course plain and straightforward.

Again, a decided course is far the happiest. If you are always wavering between the world and Christ, you will find no peace in religion. But if you are a bold, hearty, earnest disciple of Christ, then religion will give you the truest happiness. You will find her ways to be ways of pleasantness, and all her paths to be peace.

Remember, God might have cut you off in your illness. But He has graciously spared you. Oh then, show forth your thankfulness, not with your lips only, but by consecrating your spared life to

Him who has so mercifully lengthened it out. It has been well said by an old writer, "Thanksgiving is good; but thanks-living is better." A Week's Meditations for the Sick-room

MONDAY.

"Why have you afflicted me?" Numbers 11:11

Why am I afflicted? For what reason is this sickness sent to me? These are solemn questions: let me try and answer them.

First of all, this is God's doing — that I am sure of. It is You, O Lord, who have afflicted me. It is no other than Your hand that is laid upon me. And then, there is another thing, which I am equally sure of — there is a why and a wherefore for all that the Lord does. "Affliction," says Eliphaz, "comes not forth of the dust, neither does trouble spring out of the ground." It does not come by accident. It does not light upon this, or that person, as if by chance.

Let me seriously think over the matter, and try to find out why God has dealt thus with me. Ah, there was a "needs-be" for it! Perhaps I was growing worldly — and I needed something to bring me to my senses. Perhaps I was taking it easily, like many around me, slumbering on without any misgivings — and this is my Father's voice, saying to me, "Awake, you that sleep!" "The night is far spent, the day is at hand!" Or perhaps I was building too much on my health and strength, and imagining that death was a long way off; and here is a warning come to me, that mine is only an "earthly tabernacle," and it will soon be "dissolved."

Well, then, I see plenty of reasons for this affliction; and I see divine love in it all. Most true do I feel those words to be, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten." It is not, as I thought, because my God loves me not; but because He does love me, therefore He afflicts me.

If God had not loved my soul, He would have allowed me to live on as I was living. But He had pity on me; He cared for me; He longed to draw me to Himself. And so He called me aside for a while, that He might teach me something, and do me good.

Oh that this sickness may prove one of my greatest blessings! Oh that the Lord may sanctify it, and make it the means of bringing me nearer to Himself!

TUESDAY.

"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God." 1 Peter 5:6 May I not say with Job, "The hand of the Lord has touched me!" Oh that I may feel its power, and not thrust it from me!

What is now my duty?

1. I will think over my past life. This cannot be done in a moment. Let me take a searching look into the very depths of my heart. This may give me pain, and make me feel uneasy. And so it is very painful sometimes to probe a wound — but is it not needful? Must we not get to the bottom of the sore, in order to heal it? What folly to shut one's eyes, and cry, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace. The great question is, Am I right with God?

What discoveries do I make! How many and great are my sins! There are some that I never noticed at the time; others that I have long ago forgotten; and some, alas, which I committed

knowingly. How many sinful actions have I done! How many sinful words have issued from these lips! How many sinful thoughts have passed through my mind! Am I not indeed a great sinner? If I say otherwise, my own mouth will condemn me.

2. I will humble myself before God. I will cast myself down before His footstool. The cry that suits me best is the poor contrite Publican's, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

Let mine be a heartfelt contrition — true repentance. Do I hate sin because my God hates it? Do I feel its misery, and desire to forsake it? Oh, when I look up, I seem to see God's hand lifted up against me; and my heart seems to say, "Lord, I deserve it all."

3. Now then, I dare not rest a moment longer without applying for pardon. And where should a poor sinner betake himself, but to the cross of Christ? There is the only remedy. There is the only fountain in which a sinner can wash and be clean. There has many a penitent gone before me, and found forgiveness and peace. And there too will I take my stand. "Lord, save me, or I perish!"

WEDNESDAY.

"Come unto me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matthew 11:28
Ah, how many "heavy laden" ones there are in this world of sorrow!

One is laboring under a painful disease.

Another is sick and weary of a false world.

Another's heart is full, and ready to burst, with some hidden inward grief.

Sin is the weight which bears down a fourth.

Well, whatever is our peculiar case, here is a word for each and all of us. Here is a word from One who has power to relieve us.

He says, "Come unto Me!" And how shall I come? I must come humbly, feeling my own unworthiness. I must come "in prayer believing." I must come just as I am, without waiting to be worthier. I must come like a needy beggar, with nothing to offer, and with all to receive.

There is not a moment to lose. I have waited too long. The sand in my hour-glass may be nearly run out. Who knows but that there may be only a few grains of sand left? My Savior now says, "Come!" His invitation still sounds in my ears. His patience is not yet exhausted. Oh, God forbid that I should trifle with His mercy for a single instant longer, lest perchance it be soon withdrawn. I will kneel down at this very moment, and say to Him, "Lord, I come as you have bidden me: I am guilty, wash me, and make me clean. I am oppressed, undertake for me." And what is it that Jesus offers me? It is "rest." This is just what I need — rest for my poor burdened soul. What! and is this rest then really for me? Is there pardon for me, who am the chief of sinners? Is there peace for my wounded conscience? Is there acceptance for one who has so often refused to come, that he "might have life"? Yes, there is all this, and even more. There is a Heaven held out to me; the door is open, and the words, "Welcome, Welcome!" are written as it were over it.

Oh, wondrous mercy! How is it that I have shut my eyes to it so long? There is rest here in Christ, "joy and peace in believing" — and a better rest above! "There remains a rest for the people of

God."

THURSDAY.

"The Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

What! did He love me? Long have I lived with hardly a feeling of love towards my Savior. I loved my family; I loved the world; I loved myself. And I did worse, for I loved my sins. But, alas! I felt little or no affection for my Savior. My heart was alive to earthly things; but was cold and sluggish towards Him. And can it be that, in spite of all this, He loves me? Who is it that speaks thus? It is Paul. Ah, no wonder he could speak of his Savior's love, for he was a holy apostle. But stop! Does he not say (1 Timothy 1:15), "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief"? Does he not say, too, that he was "once a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious"? Then I too may take courage, and say, "He has indeed loved me." Poor and ignorant as I am, undeserving and vile as I must appear in His sight, still, still His feeling towards me is that of love. And how has He shown His love? He has "given Himself for me." I have earthly friends, who I believe would give me money, if they had it. Some of them would give me up a portion of their time, if they thought it would be of service to me. But Jesus, my best and dearest Friend, what has He given? His own life — His very self! Is not this enough to win my heart? Does it not touch me in the tenderest part? I can think of God's anger, and still remain stubborn. But now that I think of His love — my heart melts; it throbs with affection towards this most loving Savior. And how is He dealing with me at this very moment? He might have cut me off, and then perhaps I would have been at this moment in Hell. This would have been no more than I deserve. But no — He is even now dealing tenderly and lovingly with me. He has stopped me in my wayward course, that He might lead me into a better and a happier path. He has "brought me into His net, and laid affliction upon me," that He might gather me into His fold. He has "loved me with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness has he drawn me."

FRIDAY.

"Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest." Psalms 55:6

Rest — this is what I need. Sometimes, when I have come home at night, after working hard, I have felt, "How sweet is rest!" Sometimes, after a toilsome week, when the Sabbath dawns, I have said to myself, "How refreshing is this day of rest!" And now, in my sickness, when I have been racked with pain during a long and lonesome day, or have passed a sleepless night, I have thought, "Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then would I fly away, and be at rest!"

Now, is this a right wish? or is it a wrong one?

It is a wrong wish, when it arises merely from a desire to be released from present suffering. Elijah, being tired of life, "requested that he might die." Jonah, in a moment of disappointment, made a like petition. And David, under much the same feelings, uttered the words before us. The world sometimes goes badly with us. We are weary of it, and long leave it.

How is it with myself? Am I weary of my sick chamber? Do I feel that the joys of earth have left me, and therefore I wish to be gone? God forbid. I will cheerfully bear all. I will lie here just so long as my Father pleases. May His will — His blessed, holy, perfect will — and not mine, be done! "It is good for me to bear the yoke." But is not the wish which David expresses sometimes a right wish?

Yes, when it comes from the lips of a true Christian, who longs for Heaven, and is ripe for it. If we love anyone, we shall desire his company. And if our hearts throb with love to our absent Savior, well may we long to be with Him. Thus Paul had "a desire to depart, and to be with Christ." It was not because the world had shaken him off, or that he was weary of its toils and trials. No, he desired Heaven, because his Savior was there, and he panted to find himself by His side.

O God, give me such faith. Make me not only willing to leave this world at Your summons, but ready to welcome that summons, saying, "Even so come, Lord Jesus; come quickly!"

SATURDAY.

"I know their sorrows!" Exodus 3:7

Thank God for this! I have often said within myself, "No one knows my sorrows — no one can tell what I suffer!" But now I hear, as it were, a voice from Heaven, saying to me, "I know your sorrows!"

It is my Father who speaks these words. And He measures out every sorrow to me. There is not one too many. There is not one heavier, or sharper, than is needful. Neither am I called upon to bear them one day longer than is good for me. No matter what my sorrow is; whether it arises from pain of body or anguish of heart — it is the cross that my heavenly Father has laid upon me, and I will cheerfully bear it. I will kiss the hand that smites me, for it is my Father's hand!

It is no small comfort to feel that the Lord "knows our sorrows." Therefore we may be quite sure He will not lay upon us more than we can bear. As the refiner of silver carefully watches the metal while it is in the hot furnace — so does Jesus watch over His suffering people. There is no trial too small, and no pang too hidden — for His eye to reach, and His heart to pity. He feels for them, and tenderly loves them.

"Why then are you cast down, O my soul?" Surely He who was with Daniel in the den, and with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the hot fire, and with Joseph in the prison — He who said to His mourning disciples, "I am with you always" — will be with me.

No, my Savior, I dare not distrust you. I will open to you all my heart. I will tell out all my sorrows to you one by one. I will "cast all my care upon you," knowing that you "care for me." Has not Christ "borne my griefs and carried my sorrows"? Then, though they sorely try me, they cannot crush me. They may be very hard to bear; but I will not, I dare not, repine. The heavier my load, the more firmly will I lean upon my Savior. "I will trust, and not be afraid;" for "the Almighty God is my refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

SUNDAY.

"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." Revelation 21:4

Tears, and sorrow, and sickness, and death are man's heritage — they are his portion here. They are found in the cottages of the poor — and the mansions of the rich. We see them everywhere. There is not a spot in this wide world that is free from them.

Surely there must be a hidden cause for this. What is it? Sin is the cause. From the moment that sin entered into the world, man became a fallen creature; and death and misery became his portion. But is there no remedy? "Is there no balm in Gilead, no Physician," who can heal us? In this stormy world, is there no hiding place, no safe refuge? Yes, "the Sun of Righteousness has arisen, with healing in his wings." He is able to pardon sin, and to free us from its hateful power. He was "made sin for us." He suffered in our stead. He has conquered death for His people. It can no longer really hurt them. There it is still; and I must taste it; but it has lost its sting and bitterness.

Oh then, how happy may the true believer feel even now! Sorrow cannot crush him; sickness cannot overwhelm him; death cannot hurt him — for his "life is hid with Christ in God." He is safe now, and safe forever. And is there not a world before us, to which the Christian may look forward with thoughts of peace — a world where no sin can enter, and where sorrow and sighing shall flee away? Let me think of that happy world. And the more my thoughts dwell upon it, the more shall I be willing to bear a little trial here. What are a few days of pain, and a few more wearisome nights — to one who is drawing near to his heavenly home?

Oh, welcome sorrow! welcome suffering — if it only weans me from this treacherous world, and drives me to my Savior's arms! My God, subdue every sin in me. Sanctify me by your Holy Spirit, and fit me for your presence, where "there is fullness of joy," and "pleasures for evermore."

PRAYERS for the Sick Room 1. For one just taken ill.

O Heavenly Father, now that I am visited by sickness, I desire to feel that I am in your hands. I thank you for my creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life. And I thank you also for this trial, which you have sent me. I know that it is for my good, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.

O my God, I confess that I am a sinful creature. When you gave me health and strength, I was not thankful. When you gave me opportunities for serving you, I lived too much for myself. But you have stopped me in my course, and brought me down in my journey. Oh, grant that this illness may be for much good to my soul. May it teach me to know myself. May it lead me to Jesus, my precious Savior. May it be a great help to me on my way to Heaven. Make this time of sickness to be a time of blessing. Let it not be thrown away upon me.

Restore me, O Lord, if it be your will. Bless the means used for my recovery. And grant that if through your mercy I return once more to my usual health — this sickness may not leave me as it found me.

Lord, take me under your special keeping. Do with me as you see best; and prepare me either for life or for death.

Hearken to this my prayer, and bless me, both in soul and body, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

2. For Thankful Submission.

O Almighty God, in your hands are all things. In you I live, and move, and have my being. You do all things well. Make me to feel this in my present affliction. Show me that there is much love in this painful visitation. Show me that Your goodness and mercy have followed me hitherto, and enable me to see Your gracious hand in all that you do. Teach me by this affliction to know myself better,

and to know more of Christ my Savior.

Lord, make me content to bear the yoke which you lay upon me. Grant that I may willingly and cheerfully receive whatever you are pleased to send me. Teach me to give up my own will, and to accept yours. Oh teach me that lesson, so hard to learn — teach me from my heart to say, Father, not my will but may your will be done.

I know not what is good for me; but you, O God, know. I would leave all to your disposal, and ask you to deal with me as you see best. Enable me to kiss the rod that scourges me, and thankfully to bear even the heaviest burden which you, my Father, lay upon me.

Oh, turn my sorrow into joy, and my heaviness into praise. And may I one day be able to say, It is good for me to have been afflicted.

Hear, O gracious God, this my prayer, and answer it for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

3. Under much Suffering.

O Most gracious God, you do not afflict willingly or grieve your children for no purpose. Look upon me now suffering under your heavy hand. You know that my pains are great, and that I am sometimes tempted to murmur. Oh, come to my help; and give me grace sufficient for my present need.

Remove this great trial, if it be your will. Grant me some ease in the midst of my affliction. But if, O my Father — if you see fit that your servant should still suffer, oh give me grace to bow before you with humble submission. Grant me the needed strength — and then I shall patiently bear whatever you lay upon me. The cup which my Father has given me, shall I not drink it?

O blessed Savior, who endured the agony of the Cross for me, make me to feel how little my sufferings are, when compared with yours. You sympathize with your afflicted people — stretch out the arms of your compassion towards me. Meet me in this my hour of trial. Draw near to me, O my Lord; and make me to taste that you are very gracious.

All this I ask for your own name's sake. Amen.

4. For one under Concern for his Soul.

O My God, I desire to humble myself in your presence. Too long have I lived without any concern about my soul; but now you have in your great mercy awakened me.

Thanks be unto you for having shown me my exceeding sinfulness. Lord, make me to feel it more and more. O blessed Spirit, convince me of my guilt, and lead me to the Savior. I now see but very dimly — oh, give me more light. Remove every scale from my eyes, and shine brightly on my soul.

O Savior, I wish to be your servant. I wish to give myself, heart and soul, to you. I wish to be numbered among your people. Accept me, worthless as I am. Heal my soul's sickness. Give me health, and cure. Blot out every sin that I have committed, and wash me in your own most precious blood.

Oh that the remainder of my life may be devoted to you. Oh that I may hate sin even as you hate it, and may seek to be holy as you are holy. Blessed Jesus, make me to be your true disciple now;

and fit me for your heavenly kingdom hereafter, for your own name's sake. Amen.

5. For one under a lengthened illness.

O You Father of mercies, and God of love, who have kept me so long under your chastening hand, I thank you for all the tender care and kindness you have shown me.

Pardon me for any impatience, and for any restless feeling, which has at any time sprung up within me. Pardon me for my lack of faith and love. Pardon me for my coldness and dullness of heart. Pardon me for those sinful thoughts and evil desires which have crept into my soul. Oh cleanse me, Savior, from my guilt. Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Give me peace, even in the midst of suffering. Make me to hear of joy and gladness, that the bones which you have broken may rejoice. When I read your holy Scriptures, make them speak words of life and power to my soul. When I pray, may the Spirit help my infirmities. When I am alone, be with me. When I am with others, may I try to do them good. When I sleep, guard me. When I lie awake, may I enjoy sweet thoughts of you.

O God, make this long illness a blessed preparation time for eternity. Make me to know Christ, to love Him, and to serve Him. May I live upon Him from day to day, and from hour to hour. And for His sake may I at length be admitted into Heaven, to dwell with you for evermore. Amen.

6. For a Sick Person before receiving the Lord's Table.

O Most gracious Savior, I thank you that you have provided a spiritual feast for your people. Teach me to come to you day by day; for you are my hope and my support. And now my soul longs to eat bread, and drink wine, in remembrance of you. My spirit is weak and feeble; and I need support and strength within. But you are able to supply all my needs out of your fullness. Oh, do so in this holy Sacrament. Feed me with heavenly food. And, when with my lips I receive the bread and wine, may I in my heart feed upon you.

I entreat you, O my God, to prepare me for this heavenly feast, by giving me a humble, penitent, believing heart. I feel that I am in your sight utterly unworthy, utterly unclean. Oh receive me as I am, and make me more holy. If it be your good pleasure, may my life be spared for your service. Or, if you are pleased to call me hence, make me meet for the inheritance of the saints above.

Grant me now a peaceful enjoyment of you, in this most blessed ordinance. Make yourself known to me, and bless me abundantly. Cheer me in the remainder of my journey. And, when I come to the end of it, receive me into my home in Heaven, for the sake of my only Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

7. For a Sick Person after receiving the Lord's Table.

Blessed Lord, you have not left me to myself in this my sickness. I thank you for the unspeakable comforts of your Gospel. I thank you for the visits of my Minister. You raise up kind friends to comfort me. But you have given me, what is better than earthly friends, a Savior for my guilty soul! Lord, there is pardon in your precious blood. To your cross alone I look for mercy.

Heavenly Savior, you have given me a welcome to your own most blessed Feast. I thank you for it. My soul has received comfort. Oh may that heavenly food nourish me unto eternal life! Mercifully

pardon whatever was amiss. Forgive my coldness and deadness of soul. May I now be more closely united to you than ever. O my Father, look upon your poor weak child. I desire to cling to you. Strengthen me upon my bed of sickness. Let your hand support and guide me. Place your everlasting arms underneath me.

Keep my soul alive, and in health, from day to day. You have graciously nourished me at your table. Feed me ever more and more. Make me to feel the power of your Spirit in my heart; so that my faith may be more lively, my love more earnest, my submission to your will more complete.

Grant that I may bear all that you shall lay upon me, with patient thankfulness. And when, at last, I am called to pass through the valley of the shadow of death, be you with me; let your rod and your staff comfort me. Hear me, O Lord, in these my imperfect prayers, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

8. A short Prayer for one in Danger.

O My Father, hear me at this solemn time for Jesus Christ's sake. Pity a poor penitent sinner. Make me to feel my many sins, and to mourn over them. Lead me to my Redeemer. By your cross and sufferings, O Savior, by your agony and bloody sweat, good Lord, deliver me. Purge away all my guilt. May your blood cleanse me from my every sin.

O Lord, you received the dying thief; in your infinite mercy receive me. Pardon my iniquity, for it is great. Spare my life, if it be your will. And if so, oh that I may live more entirely unto you, and that I may be able each day to say: To me, to live is Christ.

But, O God, if you are going to call me away, take me I entreat you to yourself. My only trust is in Jesus. May I be found washed in the blood of that spotless Lamb. May I be found in Him pardoned and saved.

Lord, I would leave all to you. Do for me as you see best. But grant peace and salvation to my soul for Jesus Christ's sake, my only Redeemer. Amen.

9. Prayer for a dying Person.

O Most holy God, hear me at this solemn hour. My end is drawing near. Soon I shall leave this world. Oh that I may be with You. Oh take me unto your presence, where there is fullness of joy.

Lord Jesus, I am vile and sinful. Cleanse this guilty soul with your precious blood. Pardon me for all my transgressions; and fill my heart with love and peace.

Keep me from the assaults of Satan. And do you, O my Savior, stand by me as I pass through the valley, of the shadow of death. May I fear no evil. May your rod and your staff comfort me.

O my Father, deal tenderly with your poor weak and erring child. Look not upon my sins, but look upon Jesus my Savior. Pity me, and accept me, for His dear sake. I desire to bring all my sins to the foot of the cross. My cry is, God be merciful to me a sinner.

Stand by me, O God, in this my hour of weakness. Leave me not, neither forsake me, I beseech you. Stretch out your hand to hold me up, and let not my faith fail.

O pardon me, bless me, save me, keep me to the end, for Christ's sake. Amen.

S. Worldliness!

Worldliness!

Ashton Oxenden ,1884

There are certain ideas sometimes expressed regarding the world, which are unsound and unreal, and therefore require a little adjusting. Let us apply the Touchstone, and endeavor to get at the truth.

Now, this world of ours is the place which God has chosen for our present abode. It is His world — it is full of His works — and there is much in it that is very lovely. Ought we not then, in a certain measure, to regard it with favor? Surely it was never intended that we should look upon it with dislike and scorn, speaking of it with a sweeping condemnation — our God never meant that we should. What He did mean was that we should not love what is sinful in the world. We should not be tied down to its wicked customs, or follow its evil practices, or be drawn away by its follies. Therefore He cautions us not to love the world (1 John 2:15). But this is not all. He means more than this — that we must not be so taken up even by what is harmless in the world, as to love it to excess. For truly there is much in the world which, though not actually hurtful, may become hurtful to us — much that may steal away the heart, and shut out the love of God.

Take, for instance, our Daily Occupations. It is quite right that we should attend to them. The Christian may serve God without neglecting his worldly calling. Nay, it is a part of his duty to glorify God by an active, zealous attention to that work which has been given him to do, and to do it in a Christian manner. Paul bids us to be 'fervent in spirit, serving the Lord,' and yet at the same time not to be 'slothful in business.' We learn too from the Gospels, that when John the Baptist was preaching in the wilderness, and crowds came to listen to his teaching — some Publicans or Tax gatherers stepped forward, and said, 'Master, what shall we do?' And what was his answer? Did He say to them, 'You must leave your employment, if you would be real Christians?' No, He told them to follow it, but with greater honesty and integrity. 'Collect no more taxes than the government requires.' Their former sin had consisted in doing their worldly duties in a wicked way — their future religiousness was to consist in doing those duties in a holy way.

Next came some Soldiers. 'Master, what shall we do?' He does not say, 'You must put down your sword, and serve your country no more.' But he tells them to be more considerate, and less hasty, in the discharge of their duty: 'Do not extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay.' But the danger is, when we allow our worldly occupations to take up too much of our attention — when we set our hearts upon them, and allow them that place in our affections which ought to be given to God — when they are permitted to come first in our daily thoughts and desires, and to stand uppermost and foremost in our minds — when, in fact, the heart, which was made large enough for God, is allowed to waste itself upon the world.

Neither, again, is it the will of God that we should be debarred from loving our fellow-men who are in the world, as if He were jealous of our love being given to them; and as if we should be inclined

to love Him the more for loving them the less. Surely He would have us love our Parents, our Brothers, our Sisters, our Friends — with all the intensity of the heart's affections. This certainly was not John's forbidden world.

Next, I must say a word or two about the PLEASURES and AMUSEMENTS of the world.

Now, God never meant His people to hang down their heads, and go mourning all the day. He loves to see us cheerful and happy. There is an innocent mirth, which it is quite lawful for us to indulge in. But there are some amusements in the world which are actually sinful in themselves — or lead to sin and forgetfulness of God; and there are others too, which become sinful when they are followed with undue eagerness. For instance, it is quite lawful for us to have Friends, and to love them, and to feel a happiness in being with them. But when we cannot do without their society, when we find it irksome to be alone, when we grow fond of being always in company — then our very friends and companions become a snare to us, and we try, by going into the world, to forget ourselves, and to escape from those thoughts which may be pressing us too closely.

I confess that I tremble for the amount of worldliness which prevails in some professing Christian families. There is a great danger, lest pleasure and excitement should be regarded as the one object to be sought after — lest Jesus should be robbed of His true allegiance — and hearts, born for higher and better things, should be drawn down to earth, and riveted there by a chain not easily broken.

Oh, how soon — how fatally soon — we pass, imperceptibly perhaps, from things lawful to those which are doubtful — and then a step further, to those which are positively sinful! How soon does the heart, in which there was once a spark of the love of Christ — become chilled and warped by its contact with the world! How soon does the reading of light and frivolous books take the place of that precious Word, which is truth itself! And how soon is communion with God, exchanged for fellowship with the world!

I do indeed tremble for those who are dreaming away the best portion of their lives, who are spending them in vanity and emptiness, and will one day wake up with the miserable feeling that they have lived to no real purpose! Did our Lord live thus, when here on earth? Did the early Christians live thus? Can you suppose for a moment that this was the life that Peter led, or Mary of Bethany, or Aquila and Priscilla, or John? Then we cannot live thus. No, unless we are willing to give up the Savior, whom we have pledged ourselves to follow, and the glorious inheritance we profess to be living for. The question is: Are we candidates for everlasting happiness? If we are, then we must live, not for this world, but for another. Our hearts and our treasure must be there. But there is a danger into which some fall. There are some people who imagine that they are giving up the world, when, in fact, they are merely transferring their attachment from one class of worldliness to fix it upon another. Parties and theaters are perhaps put aside — when other amusements of a kindred nature, and scarcely less attractive, are indulged in. This however is not self-denial — it is still enjoying the world, though in another shape — it is turning aside from one kind of self-pleasing, that we may indulge in another.

It is a great thing to be honest with ourselves; for God is not mocked. If you really desire to follow Jesus and to renounce the world, you must mortify your earthly affections — and raise them by private prayer, and by other direct acts of faith, to things above. In the sense then that I have

mentioned, we are clearly told not to love the World. But for what reason is this warning given us? Why is this world of ours unworthy of our love?

First, because its spirit is directly in variance with God. 'Don't you know (says the Apostle) that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore will be the friend of the world, is the enemy of God.' James 4:4

What do we find, if we mix much among worldly people? Do we not find that God is put aside? He is thrust out of His proper place. People seem to make a sort of agreement that He shall for a time be forgotten. But how sad to think that our best and truest Friend — that Friend whose presence and support we shall one day so much need — that this dear Friend should ever be forcibly excluded from our hearts, and the world with all its trifles let in! And yet so it is with the ordinary run of men.

Ought we not then, as followers of Christ, to stand aside from a thoughtless, trifling world? Is not the beaten path sometimes an unsafe path? Is not the stream that flows the smoothest sometimes nearest to the precipice? Take care lest you are gliding down the stream of this world — lest you are walking in the road which hundreds walk in, and then suddenly find out that it is the way of eternal destruction!

Another reason why we should not love the world, is because its joys are at best unsatisfying. They are like alcohol to a thirsty man, which only make him thirst the more. They will never satisfy his desire, but only feed it. The worldly man, whether he is seeking after earthly pleasures, or earthly gains — is ever seeing a paradise in the distance; but the nearer he approaches it, the more sure it is to vanish, like an optical illusion, from his sight. It is thought of in his midnight dreams, and in his waking hours; but it is very seldom realized.

How different are those things which come from God! There is a substance and reality in them, which cannot be mistaken.

There is another reason why you should not love the world — and that is because it is only temporary — its joys and gains are merely for a time. There is a shifting, fleeting, fading character about them. If only the greatness and blessedness of the eternal world be a real thing with you, then you will at once see how poor this world is in comparison. This world is but a Tent, spread out for our present abode — Heaven is a building of God, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. This world is but a passing shadow — Heaven an enduring substance. This world a pilgrimage — Heaven is a home. This world is a desert — Heaven a paradise. This world is a strange land — Heaven is the place of our citizenship. This world abounds with storms — Heaven is a universal calm. This world is full of changes — in Heaven our lot will be forever fixed. This world is the abode of sin, and shame, and sorrow — Heaven is a scene of holiness, of glory, and of God.

Then ought we not to look upwards? Ought we not to set our affection on things above? We have a great work, and a perilous journey before us. Take care that you do not loiter along the way. Hasten on. Let your motto be, 'I press toward the mark!'

It is a great mistake to suppose that we must go out of the world for safety. There is no need for us to hide ourselves in some nook and corner to escape its dangers. We are to do as much good as

we can while we are here — to put our talents to the very best account, and to show plainly that, although in the world, we are not of the world — but that we have our eyes fixed on a better country, even a heavenly one!

It is not, I know, easy to take a decided and unworldly course. It will cost you much. Your conduct will be carped at, and counted folly. Yes, the stream is strong — and you must stem it. The way is steep and narrow — we do not deny it. But then how blessed to be following Christ! How safe are those who are walking closely by His side! But this difficulty often presents itself. Sometimes we scarcely know how to act for the best. 'Shall I be right in doing this or that thing — or going to this or that place?' This is a question which often comes before us — and it is very perplexing to a really earnest mind. Let me try and help you by giving you two directions, which you may always have before you.

One is — Be very careful never to put yourself in the way of the world's temptation. If, against your will, you are thrown into circumstance of temptation — then in that case God is ready to give you grace to come out unharmed. But never thrust yourself into such an evil path. For if you do this, and then expect God to keep you — then you will be mistaken.

Let us take an instance. A job may be offered to you — a job of worldly advantage — but one in which it would be difficult to serve God faithfully. Now, in such a case, to accept it would be to put yourself in the way of temptation — and therefore to debar yourself from God's protection, and to risk the safety of your soul. Whereas boldly to refuse it would be your duty, and in the end your happiness. Or you may have entered upon some occupation or amusement, which you may after a while discover to be gradually deadening your heart, and unfitting you for the inner work of heart-devotion. Then, as you value your soul, at once turn from it, and give it up. Better to displease some, and to lose face with others — better to be despised for Christ's sake — than to forfeit the favor of God, and to miss the heavenly prize!

Again, when you find the world creeping in, at once check yourself, and be upon your guard. Even Christian people, who in many respects have given up the world, who flatter themselves that they have altogether put it aside, and are beyond its reach — may still have very worldly thoughts and feelings. Oh, remember, the world may be in your heart — though not in your actions! You may love the world, and secretly pine after it — though you have outwardly renounced it.

I have more to say on this subject, and shall therefore speak of it in the next section, where I shall show you that there is a right way of using the world. May God help us, while in the world, to live near to Him! May He be with us in our conflicts! May He be as a Sun to cheer us, and a Shield to protect us! And may He bring us at last to that eternal rest which He has prepared for those who truly love Him, and earnestly desire to serve Him! In the last section I showed you what 'the World' is, which we are charged not to love. I pointed out to you that the Christian is bound to avoid all that is actually sinful in the world, and also that which, though innocent in itself, becomes sinful when allowed to be too engrossing. He must not love it — and indeed, if the love of the Father is in him, he will not and cannot love it. But there is a right way of treating the world, and there is a blessing to be obtained from it. It is not to be scorned and trampled upon — as if it were all evil; nor to be rejected, as altogether worthless. Paul tells us very differently — he speaks of 'using this world, as not abusing it.'

It has been said that 'the element of Fire is a gift of Heaven, when we use it for the purpose of light and warmth — but it becomes a flake of Hell when we let it loose over the sleeping city, or the fruitful plains. Even so the world is a blessed angel to us — if we make it our servant; but it is a malignant demon to us — if it becomes our master.'

Let us see then how we can use the world to our profit.

First, I would say, by endeavoring to fill rightly our several relationships in life. There was a time when our Lord put this test before His followers, 'Are you willing to leave father and mother, husband, wife, children, lands, and possessions, for My sake?' Thank God, He does not put us under this searching requirement now — though, if He did, I hope that some would be found, who could yield up all that is most dear to them — could empty their hearts of all their deepest affection — and in answer to the question, 'Do you love Me more than these?' could say, 'Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you!' 'There is none upon earth that I desire in comparison with you.'

But, I say, our Lord in His tender mercy does not require this of us now. He allows us to love — yes, and with intense affection — those whom He has given to us, so long as they do not usurp His supreme place in our hearts. These are not what we are cautioned not to love. This is not the forbidden world. But how are we to fill our relationships in the world? Are you a Parent? Let the very image of your heavenly Father be reflected in your conduct. Bring up your children for Him. Let your love towards them be the counterpart of His love towards you. Are you a Son or a Daughter? Let a spirit of dutiful obedience mark your actions. Let your great aim be to honor, to please, and to comfort your parents. Are you in a high position? Be not over-anxious to have the preeminence among your fellow-men — to display your talents, or your wealth, so as to attract their admiration. But rather strive to use your influence for good — and remember that your position is like that of 'a city which cannot be hidden.' Or are you occupying a humbler place in the world? Then, you also have a certain amount of influence, which you may exercise for Christ. You too may shine in that special walk of life which has been chosen for you.

You should use this world then, and that particular position in it which God has caused you to fill, for Him. And then, whether rich or poor, great or lowly — you will spread a blessing around you, and leave a Christian mark behind you. In our worldly employments too, we should endeavor to serve God. Whether we be ministers, or merchants, or tradesmen, or laborers — whatever our calling may be — we should let our Christianity be apparent in that calling. We should take our stand as servants of God. Ours should be not a mere worldly standard, but a Christian standard. Unswerving truthfulness, an honesty that will face the light, a rectitude which cannot be impeached, a high tone bearing the gospel impress — these should characterize all our dealings in the world. All such done as in God's sight, and with our eye ever looking for His approval, will doubtless be acceptable to Him.

Instead of regarding the hours employed in our trade, or our profession, as so much time taken away from the religious life — we should rather look upon it as the appointed sphere in which that life may display itself. When the man, from whom the Legion had been expelled, asked Jesus to allow him to continue altogether with Him — our Lord in His reply sent him back to his home and his calling; showing that in the right discharge of his worldly duties he would best glorify God. So you see that the following of a trade or profession is not only consistent with true religion — but it is often the chief sphere in which our religion shows itself.

Further, whatever we possess in this world — we should use it for God's glory. Our TIME should be employed for Him, not expended upon ourselves, not wasted or frittered away in useless pursuits — but employed for God. Our FOOD is not given us to pamper our appetites, but to strengthen us. We must not, as some do — live to eat and drink, but eat and drink to live. The Apostle bids us, 'Whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do — to do all to the glory of God.' Our MONEY too should be carefully expended. It may otherwise be a great snare to us, dragging us down to ruin by slow degrees. For we are told that 'the love of money is the root of all evil!' And are we not warned that it is hard for a rich man — yes, impossible for one who trusts in riches — to enter the kingdom of Heaven? But if our money be used in a Christian way — what an important means of usefulness it may prove! How much good we may do with it! How greatly we may forward the work of God! How we may encourage those who are laying themselves out for Christ and His service! There are around us works going on — distinctly Christian works — which by our apathy we may positively check — but by our hearty interest, by our energy, and by our contributions, we may effectually promote.

Once more, we should use this world as a mere dwelling-place, and not as our home. There are some who so love the world, that they have no wish to exchange it for Heaven. They have made their nest here, and have no desire to leave it. Others again cling to life, not because it is dear to them; but because the future is dark, and they fear to enter it. Thus we see them clinging to the world, though it has been anything but a joyous world to them. Yes, and clinging to it more tenaciously as years go on; for the tree has struck its roots so deep in the ground, that it is hard to root it up. But thank God, there are others, who though they are happy enough here, are ever in a state of readiness to fly away and be at rest — to depart and be with Christ, which is far better! This world is to them only as an inn, in which they are sojourners for a while — but their home is above. This world is a strange land, through which they are passing, on their way to the 'better country.' And now, I have two things more to say on this subject. I have a word of caution, to put you on your guard; and also a word of encouragement, to help you. My CAUTION is this — Do not attempt what hundreds attempt — do not endeavor to accomplish what cannot be accomplished — namely, to make room in your heart for the love of the world, and also the love of the Jesus. They cannot exist together. You cannot serve both God and Mammon.

There are numbers trying to mix up the two. But what is the consequence in such cases? If we could look into these hearts, especially if they have experienced something of the power of grace within — we would find the religious life flagging; its beauty and its brilliancy paling away; the warmth of its love chilled, as it passes through the cold atmosphere of the world, having lost as it were, all its power!

No, we cannot serve two masters! We cannot drink the cup of the Lord — and yet quaff the sweet but poisonous cup of the world! One or other must be put aside — one or other must gain the day.

Choose then between the two. Draw for yourself a broad line of demarcation. Draw it boldly, meekly, prayerfully, thoughtfully — and, having drawn it, never overstep it. Harken to the call of Him who is your truest Friend, 'Come out from among them, and be separate, says the Lord; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.' And now for a word of ENCOURAGEMENT. We ask you to give up the world. This is no small demand — it will cost you much to give it up. But then we offer you more than an

equivalent. And surely, since the heart is capable of loving God Himself, it is sad, very sad, to see it wasting itself on a cold, narrow, and unsatisfying world. When we tell you then not to love the world — we also tell you of something better which you may love. We would not wish to drive the world out of your heart — and then leave it empty. It must love something. You cannot give a pent-up stream its choice of drying up or flowing on. It must, after a while, rush on either in a right or wrong channel. Direct it rightly, and it will flow joyously through the meadows, fertilizing them in its onward course. But attempt to block up its passage — and it will soon force its way, a thing of madness and of ruin. Stop it you cannot — it must flow in one direction or another. So it is with the heart. Let it not take its own course, unfettered and free — for then we shall have the riot of worldliness. But let us ask God to bring us under the gentle bondage of His grace. Ask Him to drive out the world — and to fill the empty void with His own presence. Ask Him to shed abroad His own love in your heart. This will satisfy all your craving. To love God — to have our hearts filled with His love — this is our highest happiness! Then shall we have no need to go hither and thither with our broken cisterns — but there will be within us 'a well of water springing up unto everlasting life!'

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