

WRITINGS OF POSECK J A VON

by Poseck J.A. Von

A collection of theological writings, sermons, and essays by Poseck J.A. Von, compiled for study and devotional reading.

2 Chapters

Table of Contents

1. S. God's Ways in Training His Own for His Service and Testimony
2. S. One thing I do

S. God's Ways in Training His Own for His Service and Testimony

God's Ways in Training His Own for His Service and Testimony Being Lectures on the book of Jonah. From the German of "Worte der Wahrheit in Liebe."

J. A. von Poseck.

Chapter 1. 1888 163.

Two Essential Requisites for Every Labourer in the Work of the Lord.

It is a well-known truth confirmed by daily experience, that "justification by faith," and "peace with God," are not one and the same thing, nor do they take place at the same time, though the latter is the consequence of the former. As soon as one believes, he is safe and justified before God, but it may be some time before the soul enjoys settled peace with God.

It is dangerous for one who has no real solid peace with God, to be engaged in the service of the Lord and the testimony of divine truth, for he is apt, though unintentionally, to preach or teach what he has not experienced in his own soul. And where the conscience has not been purged and set free, and is not kept sweet in the presence of God, an unbroken will generally manifests itself. Such have then, sooner or later, to pass through bone-and heart-breaking experience in the school of God, — in the "belly of the fish," as it were, — to learn practically the terrible nature and effects of sin, of self-will and of the desperately wicked heart; and then, when human help and deliverance appear impossible, to throw themselves, like Jacob, upon the Lord, and exclaim, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me!"

There are then two essential requisites for practical fitness and usefulness in the work of the Lord for every believer, especially such whom the Lord will use for His work and testimony. These are

1. A broken will; and 2. A broken heart. True it is, that every christian has to make a life-long humbling experience of the existence and activity of his own will, and of his own evil heart. But it is no less true, that there is a time in the life of every true christian, where our all-gracious and all-wise God with His mighty hand, in the school of deep trials, breaks our natural will to pieces, that we may learn to say in truth, "Not my will be done, but Thine," when we shall find, that His hand is as tender as it is mighty.

Every day's experience, even in common life, bears testimony to the necessity of the perverse natural will being kept in with bit and bridle. A young horse, which has not been in due time broken in, will be of no use to its master. With our will unbroken, we are unable to discern and to prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God, whether as to the practical difficulties of daily life, or as to His work and service. As the fog conceals the sun, so our own will hides from us the will of God. But if in the school of deep trials and sorrows, often alas! caused by our self-will, we have learnt to judge our evil, foolish, and perverse will, and to abhor it, we shall be able "to prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." As with the will, so with the heart. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." And why? Because it "is desperately wicked," and

"deceitful above all things." None but a fool would trust a wicked man, or believe one who is a thorough deceiver. In your heart do you confide?

God's heart from yourself you hide. But when our heart with its perverse or idolatrous inclinations, lusts, designs, and plans, has been broken practically, God can reveal unto us His own heart of grace, love, and tender sympathy. In this world of sin and sorrow there is a saying that such and such have "died of a broken heart." But God teaches us to "live with a broken heart," aye, and live very happy with it too. A broken will enables us to serve the Lord, but a broken heart makes us serve Him "after His own heart," — in spirit and in truth.

Jonah, courageous servant of God though he was, had not yet learnt to deny himself, his own will and judgment, — to be dependent upon God alone. He was thinking of his own position, his own importance, of his own dignity and character as a prophet, forgetting that he was God's prophet. No sooner does he receive a commandment from God, the carrying out of which, in his opinion, might possibly impair the dignified character of his prophetic ministry, than he goes his own way and attempts to "flee from the presence of the Lord." But the Lord soon showed him the folly of such an attempt, and Jonah had to learn some crushing lessons, two of them in the belly of the fish at the bottom of the sea, the third under the gourd. Our meditations on this most instructive little portion of holy writ, therefore, naturally divide themselves into two parts:

1. What Jonah learnt in the fish's belly;
2. What he learnt under the gourd.

Before entering upon the first part of our meditations, I would direct the attention of the reader to the various characters of the instruments employed by the Lord, to train and fit each one for His service. What a difference between the mighty storm and the sultry, silent, east wind; between the huge fish and the little worm and the gourd! Further, what a difference of the scenes! In the first chapter the deafening roar of the tempest, and the howling uproar of the elements; in the second chapter the silence of the grave in the belly of the fish at the bottom of the sea. Then again, in the third chapter the immense fluctuation, turmoil, cruising and traffic of the capital of the ancient world, compared with the quiet rural scene under the gourd, on the east of Nineveh, presented in the fourth chapter. What contrasts! Jehovah "hurled the storm on the sea," He "prepared the great fish"; He "prepared the gourd" (or "Palmchrist tree"). It was He again that "prepared the worm," and He "prepared the sultry (or silent) east wind." How different these agents and links in the chain of Divine Providence! Yet they must all work together for Jonah's good.

How much more does this hold good for us, christian reader? "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to purpose." Blessed be His great and glorious name!

Part 1. What Jonah Learnt in the Fish's Belly.

Chapter 2.

Jonah during the Storm. The first two chapters of the Book of Jonah teach us two all-important truths. In the first we learn, that there is no place, however likely for escape, where God's arm cannot reach us. The second chapter shows us, that there is no prison, however unlikely for escape, from which God's hand cannot deliver us. What place more suitable for escape than the

wide endless sea? If the criminal wants to escape from the hands of justice, he embarks for some distant country. God knows how to overtake thee, fugitive, who, Jonah-like, desirest to go thine own way, and to "flee from the presence of the Lord." And where in this world could a prison be found from whence escape appears to be more impossible than the fish's belly at the bottom of the sea? Do not despair, prisoner. To God it is but a small thing to deliver thee from the strongest prison, as soon as it seems good to Him, and He has accomplished His purpose in placing thee there.

Perhaps some might say that Jonah, as the Lord's prophet, ought to have been too intelligent, and God-fearing, to make the vain attempt to flee from the Lord's presence. Let us not deal too hardly with the prophet. Have not we like him attempted to go westward, when God has told us to go eastward? Jonah was a prophet of God; but are we not children of God, greater than Jonah, yea, greater than John, the forerunner of the Lord? (Matthew 11:11). And have we not had to experience to our sorrow and shame, how vain such attempts are, but also how near is God's hand in deliverance to those who call on Him out of the prison of self-inflicted distress, as soon as we, in the fish's belly, had learnt the lesson God was teaching us there? Alas! how often have we followed, like Jonah, the promptings of our natural will, forgetting that truth so important for the practical life of faith, as expressed in Psalms 139:1-24 :, and which written by David nearly 150 years before Jonah, must surely have been known to, if now forgotten by, him. Let us turn to the first half of that instructive Psalm.

1 "O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me.

2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, Thou understandest my thought afar off.

3 Thou compassed my path and my lying down, And art acquainted with all my ways.

4 For there is not a word in my tongue, But, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether.

5 Thou has beset me behind and before, And laid Thine hand upon me.

6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;

It is high, I cannot attain unto it.

7 Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?

8 If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there;

If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there.

9 If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

10 Even there shall Thy hand lead me, And Thy right hand shall hold me."

11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me Even the night shall be light about me.

12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee; But the night shineth as the day: The darkness and the night are both alike to Thee."

It was just these searching truths which Jonah practically forgot, when trying to "flee from the presence of the Lord."

God, Who willeth not that a sinner should die in his sins but repent and live, had commanded His prophet to go to Nineveh with a message of warning from the wrath to come, Nineveh was then the first and greatest city of the world, before Babylon rose into prominence. Its vices and wickedness had attained such a height, that it had "come up" before God.

It is a solemn truth, reader, that sin has a voice, which cries to heaven for God's righteous retribution. The word of God, both in the Old Testament and in the New, confirms it. God says to Cain, "What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground." God then pronounces judgment upon Cain. To Abraham the Lord said, "Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous, I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto Me; and if not, I will know." Further, in the New Testament, "Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth" (James 5:4). In the same way the cry of Nineveh's wickedness had "come up" before God, and He had commissioned His prophet with a message of gracious warning to that city. But how did the messenger entrusted with such a gracious charge receive it? He little thought of the weal or woe of those millions of sinners at Nineveh, for whose reproof and salvation that message had been designed. His first thought is of his own position, and whether the consequences of that message might not contribute to impugn his character as a prophet of God. In the end (chap. 4:) he himself unwittingly betrays his selfish thoughts that led him into disobedience in the foolish attempt to flee from the presence of the Lord. He appears to have reasoned somewhat thus, "God must have gracious intentions toward Nineveh, in charging me with this message of warning. And in thus sending me to them, Jehovah, no doubt, will invest my words with divine power in conviction, and the Ninevites will turn from their evil works and repent. God then on His part will repent of the judgment announced to them by me, His prophet. I know that He is a gracious and pitiful God, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth Himself of the evil (Jonah 4:2). He will pardon the city, and I, Jonah, Jehovah's prophet, shall be exposed as a lying prophet, the judgment announced by me, not having been carried out. Has not Jehovah Himself spoken by Moses thus, 'But the prophet which shall presume to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously, thou shalt not be afraid of him.'" The temptation in Jonah's case was not small; but where was his faith? where his trust in God, and the single eye and heart in simple obedience of faith? Was not God, Who had charged Jonah with the announcement of judgment upon Nineveh, able to take care of the character of His prophet? When the judgment, announced by Jonah, did not take place on account of the repentance of the Ninevites, did they consider Jonah to be a false prophet? Not so. They were but too glad and thankful, that they had been pardoned and spared.

Oh what a wretched and mischievous thing is "self," wherever it lifts up its ugly head, especially in the Lord's work and service! Rather let Nineveh perish with its millions of souls, than the personal character and ministry and position of a prophet of God be impugned! Alas! worse than this, rather let the flock of God, for whom the good Shepherd died, be scattered to the winds and become a

prey to wolves, who do not spare the flock, than a distinguished luminary in the church confess, that he in some important church matter has made a mistake. The history of the church down to the most recent days bears testimony to the sorrowful fruits of such unjudged selfishness, self will, and pride in some, who were looked up to as servants of the blessed Lord, Who is meek and lowly of heart. Oh, may we "in the crushing sense of our nothingness," learn to be small before Him, Who is the great "I am" in God's presence; once the lowliest of all servants, taking the lowest place upon the earth, and therefore exalted to the right hand of God, from whence He will appear as "Lord of lords and King of kings," to judge this world! May we learn better to understand His ways and to enter upon them! "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not hither, but watereth the earth and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall My word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Was not Jonah's errand a proof of it? Let us now return to him. God had told Jonah to go to the east, to Nineveh; with that solemn yet gracious message. But Jonah goes just the opposite way. He goes to the west, to Joppa, taking ship for Tarshish to "flee from the presence of the Lord." Thrice in our chapter (as thrice also in the first) does the Holy Spirit make mention of the prophet's vain attempt to flee from the presence of the Lord, as if to point out the folly of such an attempt. The town of Joppa has in this sense a very instructive significance. Two servants of the Lord, the one a prophet and the other an apostle, went to that place. Both were entrusted by God with a message to the Gentiles; the prophet of the Old Testament with a warning message of judgment, and the apostle of the New with a message of salvation, grace and peace through Jesus Christ. The prophet went to Joppa in disobedience to the will of God, but the apostle under the guidance of the Spirit. Both of them had in their gracious Master's school to be trained for their service. Hard were the lessons which each of the two had to learn, but those destined for the prophet were the hardest by far, for in his case it was not the consequence of mere ignorance, but of wilful disobedience. Peter, on the roof of the house of Simon the tanner, learnt by the vessel descending from heaven, like a great sheet knit at the four corners, an all-important lesson from heaven, before he left Joppa for Caesarea, to convey to the first fruits of the Gentiles the heavenly message of peace through Jesus Christ. But for Jonah two much harder though blessed lessons were reserved, which he had to learn at the bottom of the sea in the belly of the fish, after he in disobedience had sailed from Joppa to "flee from the presence of the Lord." What lessons! How different in their character and locality, and yet so rich in grace and blessing in their intentions and results!

"None can hinder what He will;

Wait and trust in Him, be still;

Go the way which He doth send thee, Sure and blessed will the end be."

1881 179 The storm sent by God now broke out. It must have been of extraordinary violence, for "the ship was like to be broken." Even the mariners, accustomed to storms, were frightened and "cast forth the wares that were in the ship, into the sea, to lighten it of them, and cried every man unto his god." But where was Jonah? "Gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was

fast asleep." Amidst the storm, when every one, from the captain down to the cabin boy, is wide awake and astir, the prophet lies fast asleep. And why? His conscience began to awake, and he wanted to sleep it off, and he succeeded. Alas! how deep is the torpor of a conscience lulled to sleep by Satan, the world, and the flesh, be it the conscience of a saint, who has departed from the path of obedience, walking in wilful disobedience, or that of a backslider. Only in the latter case his sleep is heavier and deeper and generally of longer duration. That solemn warning of the apostle in his Epistle to the Ephesians (Ephesians 5:14), is addressed to believers, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light."

Solemn words these, addressed to Christians, careless Christians! They resemble a man who has laid himself to sleep in a dead-house among corpses. What a situation to be in! Who but a madman, or a drunkard, would think of laying down to sleep in a dead-house! The first part of the above solemn call is, "Awake thou that sleepest! So it was with Jonah. The Gentile captain of the ship must come and rouse him from his sleep with these words, "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not." What mortifying words addressed by an unconverted man of the world, as happens sometimes, when collaring a christian out of his sleep? Can there be anything more humbling for a child of God? Alas, to how many a christian, who has left the path of obedience, to walk in self-will and worldliness, has that solemn call been addressed, "Awake thou that sleepest! But like the sluggard, who when roused in the morning, only turns himself upon his side, and soon is faster asleep than before, so have you, poor christian worldling (what a contradiction in terms!), when half roused from your perilous sleep, but relapsed into a deeper one. You have heeded only the first part of that awakening call, regardless of the second, "Arise from the dead!" Your unwilling ear did not listen to this second clause, and you have relapsed into sleep and slept even faster than before in company of the "dead," amidst whom you have made your bed. This reminds me of a most affecting account I read some time ago of the death of a little girl about eight years old. On passing one evening a cemetery she perceived through the railings some pretty flowers on some of the graves. She wanted to take a few of them. The gate being open, she entered and picked them, but in taking them she was caught by the sexton. Several graves having been lately despoiled of their floral ornaments, for whose preservation the sexton was responsible, the wretched man determined this time to inflict exemplary punishment. He seized the poor crying little maid, and dragged her into the dead-house, where several dead bodies were lying, and locked her in, intending to leave her there for an hour. He then returned to his work. Being very busy that evening, and having several calls to attend to, he returned home late, and worn out and tired soon went to sleep, having entirely forgotten his prisoner in the dead-house. In the morning he suddenly bethought himself of the poor victim of his cruelty. Terrified he hastened to the dead-house and opened the door. But what a sight presented itself to the wretched man! The number of the dead bodies had increased by one! Cowering down in the farthest corner sat the poor little maid — dead. Her lovely childish little face was distorted with terror. In her lap lay still the small nosegay, culled from the grave. The cold, the atmosphere of death and corruption, and above all the fright at the presence of the corpses, had soon put an end to her young existence. When the in-human perpetrator of that barbarous deed was taken to prison, the numerous police were scarce able to prevent his being lynched by the furious crowd.

I have not mentioned this terrible incident, to produce a sensational impression upon the christian readers of these pages, which would be neither profitable nor edifying for them. But should there be even one amongst them who has practically forgotten the purification of his sins, and gone to sleep in the dead-house of the world, perhaps the sad incident mentioned above may be to him a serious warning in its proper application. Poor, thrice unhappy, worldly-minded child of God! You are in a far more terrible position than the poor little maid just spoken of. She knew but too well in what place and company she was — in the dead-house amongst corpses. But you scarcely appear to be conscious that you are in the same place and company, only spiritually, which certainly does not improve either the place or the company. She felt the terrible atmosphere of death and corruption in that dead-house! But to you, that pestilential savour of death, stifling the spiritual life, has become your natural atmosphere. She, poor little captive, felt the darkness of that terrible night there without a morning. The silence of death was awful to her, and the least noise in that chamber of the dead would have frightened her still more, unless it had been the noise of approaching footsteps without. Oh, how the poor little captive at such a sound would have sped towards the door, calling out for deliverance. And if the door had been opened, would she have delayed a moment longer in her terrible prison? No; with winged steps she would have fled from the pestiferous cage of death into the fresh open air, thanking God for her deliverance from that terrible abode. But you, poor unhappy strayer from the grace of God and of His Christ, have settled down in this world, where everything bears the stamp of sin and death, and made your bed with the "dead in trespasses and sins." Instead of going into the world, whither the Lord has sent you, as the Father sent Him into it, a faithful witness of the truth, and carrying with you the savour of the gospel of life and peace for your fellowmen, you have embarked with the world, whose friendship is enmity against God, in the way of disobedience. You have forgotten that the cross of Christ which has removed every barrier between God and you, ought to be an everlasting barrier between the world and you, the world being by it crucified unto you, and you unto the world. Like Jonah you have gone into the sides of the ship to sleep off the storm — the trouble of your conscience. Beware, christian worldling! God does not always send an outward storm, as in the case of Jonah. Do not close your ears and heart to the voice of God, which not only "is mighty upon the waters," but speaks mightily to the conscience and heart, by His Spirit and word, lest you should fare like some of those at Corinth, who, from their spiritual sleep fell into the sleep of death. It is indeed "far better to depart and to be with Christ," but it is sad, very sad, to "fall in the wilderness" by God's chastening hand. To be called home in such a way, cut off like a barren fruitless branch, is a sad way of going home.

"Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." That is, awake, rise and open the shutters of your dark chamber of deathlike sleep, that the sun may shine in, and Christ give you light. And should there be in your heart some secret idol-chamber — be it love of money, or worldliness, or something else which has slipped in between Christ and you, and taken His place in your heart — open the door and let the light of Christ and His word shine in and expose the idol in all its hideousness, and in the morning light of our good Shepherd's restoring grace, Dagon's stump and members will be seen scattered about. Your eye being light again and single, set on Christ, your whole body will be light, and your heart shall bask in the sunshine of the love of the Father and of the Son, in the power of His Spirit no longer grieved, Who glorifies Christ, receives of His and shows it unto us.

It was not so with Jonah. The storm and the Gentile shipmaster had shaken him out of his sleep, but his conscience had not yet been fully roused. For this something more was needed. Even these Gentile mariners appear to have recognised the extraordinary character of that storm. They felt that a higher hand was here at work, to reach some unknown sinner sheltered by them. They therefore cast lots to learn for whose sake that disastrous tempest had come upon them. Instead of finding an Achan in the camp, we have a Jonah in the ship. And as in the former case, so here the lot fell upon the right man — Jonah. Now his conscience, as well as his body, is fully awake. At the question, "Tell us, we pray thee, for whose sake this evil is upon us? What is thine occupation, and whence comest thou? What is thy country, and of what people art thou?" he answers, "I am an Hebrew; and I fear Jehovah, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land," and confesses to them his sinful and vain endeavour to flee from the presence of the Lord. Even the Gentile mariners see the folly of Jonah's attempt to flee from the presence of his God, and the prophet has to listen to the humbling question, "Why hast thou done this?" But God's purpose had not yet been reached by the prophet's confession, wrung from him by the convicting lot. Jonah must be sent to his destination in the belly of the fish at the bottom of the sea, there to learn in God's house of correction, what God would teach him. The storm of the sea continued to rage, and the terrified mariners ask Jonah, "What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us?" Jonah now submitted to the mighty hand of God. Whatever may have been his other personal shortcomings, he was no coward. He tells them, "Take me up and cast me forth into the sea, so shall the sea be calm unto you; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you."

We now come to a lovely feature of these Gentile mariners. Although they owed to Jonah all their trouble and distress, and even the loss of the whole cargo, as well as their evident jeopardy, they nevertheless hesitate till the last moment to avail themselves of the only means, indicated by the prophet himself, of saving them, by throwing Jonah overboard. "Nevertheless they rowed hard to bring the ship to the land."

How many christian mariners in the ecclesiastical barge might take a leaf from the book of these rough Gentile sailors, in cases where there is — we do not say, an Achan in the camp, but — a Jonah in the ship! Hear we not in such cases but too often the cry, "Overboard with him?" "Let us throw him into the sea, that the sea may be calm unto us" is, when translated into church language, "Let us excommunicate him, that we may be no longer troubled." Such oarsmen will flatter themselves in vain with the hope that, after Jonah's ejection from the ship, the sea will be calm unto them. Generally just the opposite will occur; nay, it often happens, that not the one who was believed to be the "Jonah in the ship," but one or some of these unhesitating mariners get somehow into the fish's belly, and to the bottom of the sea, in order to learn there the lessons which they had thought to be reserved for Jonah.

These honest and gracious Gentile mariners endeavoured, if possible, to save Jonah, and the ship, and themselves. But their efforts, however well-meant, were in vain. God's wise, holy, and gracious will and purpose as to His prophet must be accomplished. But these mariners — we can hardly call them any longer unconverted — did not proceed with the execution of the prophet's own behest, till they had bowed down before Jehovah for what they were about to do to His prophet. How beautiful and instructive is their short prayer: "We beseech Thee, Jehovah, we beseech Thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for Thou, Jehovah, hath done as it pleased Thee." They then take Jonah and throw him into the sea.

Immediately the storm ceases, and the sea becomes calm. "Then the men feared Jehovah exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto Jehovah, and made vows." The "voice of the Lord upon the waters" had not only spoken to Jonah, but also to the Gentile mariners, who, like the Thessalonians of a later day, "turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God." They were thus a type of the Gentiles, who, after the tempest of "Jacob's trouble" is over, shall turn to God.

"Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights." But before entering upon the next chapter, let us pause a few moments to consider One greater than Jonah, even Jesus — likewise "during the storm."

Chapter. 3. 1889 195.

Jesus During the Storm.

Mark 4:35-41.

What a different scene have we here! Not a prophet, who thinks of his own authority rather than of the warning and salvation of his fellow-men, hastening towards judgment and perdition, and who, during the storm brought on by his disobedience, lays himself and his conscience to sleep. How different is the portion of the gospel referred to above, which describes in an especial way the perfect and uninterrupted service of Him, "Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant!" We behold here the greatest of all prophets, of whom Moses testified, the God-man Jesus Christ, Who had left His heavenly glory, the home of every blessing, to exchange it for this world, the home of sin, misery, death, and judgment, to warn rebellious sinners to flee from the wrath to come, and to show them the only way of salvation through faith in Him, Who is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life," and without Whom "no man cometh unto the Father."

Another day of His indefatigable service of love in the path of obedience and righteousness approached its end. He (Whose works were so many that, "if they should be written every one," His bosom disciple, who most likely knew most about them, could but add, "I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written,") had bidden His disciples to cross to the other side of the lake. The multitude surrounding Him is dismissed, and the boat with its precious freight quits the shore. But Satan, "the prince of the power of the air," also knew of the contents of that little vessel. He would try whether he could sink the fragile little craft, with its cargo so obnoxious to him. For that this storm, so unlike that sent by God in Jonah's case, came not from God, but from Satan, with God's permission (for the glory of His Son, and the sifting of the disciples), appears plain to me, as I hope to show further on.

What a difference between these two storms! In the former, a self-willed servant of God, fast asleep in indifference amidst the tempest caused by his disobedience; here, the obedient Son of God, Whose "meat" it was to do the will of Him who had sent Him, and to do His work. The lowliest and most willing of all servants, amidst the raging storm, sleeping on a pillow in the hinder part of the ship, whilst the furious billows, lashed by the storm, strike the fragile barge, enter and fill it, threatening every moment to send it to the bottom. But in that little ship there was One greater than Jonah. He slept "the sleep of the Just." Here it is not the reasonable apprehension of a heathen shipmaster rousing the indifferent prophet from his sleep, but the selfish unbelief of the

disciples, who thinking only of their own danger, with harsh reproach and rude hand, awake their gracious Master from His well-deserved sleep! Little were they mindful at that moment of Who it was, sleeping so calmly and peacefully amidst the storm, in the hinder part of the ship! How could their boat, were it ever so fragile, sink and they be drowned, with such a Pilot, who was none other than the Greater of heaven and earth, the Son of the living God! Peter had owned Him as such, but how sadly he had forgotten it at that moment. "Master, carest Thou not that we perish?" What words, addressed to such a Master! As to courage of faith, the prophet Jonah was far superior to them, though his eyes had not seen what theirs had seen, nor his ears heard what theirs had heard. Jonah had bidden the mariners to cast him into the sea for doubtless he believed that God, Who had sent him with such a message to Nineveh, was able to deliver him again from the watery grave, to accomplish his mission, after he should have learnt what God would teach him. But though Jonah was superior in that respect to the Lord's disciples in the little boat, how incomparably inferior in true grace, meekness, and lowliness, was he to their Master and his, Who placed him into the depths of the sea in the fish's belly, and then again deposited him on the safe shore! That gracious Master, aroused from His sleep in so rough a manner, now arose in His quiet majesty and power, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, "Peace, be still." And the wind and the waves are calm, as savage dogs lie down at the bidding of their master. These words of the Lord appear to show clearly that this storm came not from God, but had been brought about by Satan, for in the former case Jesus would not have rebuked the wind. The cause as well as the intent why this storm was sent appears to be just the opposite to Jonah's case.

"And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And He said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? How is it ye have no faith?" The gracious Master does not begin with rebuking His disciples, as we most likely should have done in a similar case. He first rebukes the winds, then His disciples. First He removes the cause of their unbelief, then He reproves their unbelief: first grace, then truth. He dwelt among them full of grace and truth. So it ought to be with us.*

[* Except in case of evil doctrines (dishonouring to Christ Himself) where (we may say perhaps) [it] would be, "truth and grace."]

"And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, "What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him?" Now at last they seem to become conscious again of Who it was that had slept so calmly in the hinder part of the ship, though they had daily heard His mighty words and works.

Christian reader! Do we not but too much resemble those disciples in the ship? Like them we enjoy the peace after the storm, after the Lord, through His wondrous and gracious intervention, has once more strengthened and rebuked our little faith. But where is our peace during the storm? What do we know of the "peace of Christ ruling in our hearts?" (Colossians 3:15). What do we know of that peace of which the Lord spoke before He left this world to enter, through the sufferings of the cross, into glory, there to prepare a place for us? How much do we know of this peace amidst the storms of opposition in a hostile world, — a peace of which the life of Jesus on earth was the perfect expression? (Psalms 16:8-11, Acts 2:25-28).* May the Lord in His infinite grace keep and establish us in this, "His peace," in days of general earthquake, without and within, when in every sphere of life, be it religious, political, social, commercial or scientific, the storms of scarcely controllable human passions are raging around us, so that it almost seems as if the

prince and god of this world had the aim, by overthrowing every divine and human foundation and order, to hurry on professing christendom with increasing celerity towards open apostacy.

[* Of that peace the Lord spoke to His disciples, and to us, in His touching words of parting, "My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).]

"These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." A beautiful example of such a peace, during the storm, we behold in the demeanour of the apostle Paul on his voyage to Rome. He, like Jonah, was to go to the capital of the Gentiles with a message of warning and of mercy. He also, like Jonah, had gone his own way, 1:e., to Jerusalem, but not from the same selfish motive (though not excusable on that account). He also found himself, so to speak, in the fish's belly, to be prepared for his mission to Rome, as Jonah for his to Nineveh. I shall enter more fully upon this later on.

Chapter 4. 1889 211.

Jonah in the Fish's Belly.

We are accustomed to the well-known expression, "Jonah in the whale's belly;" but the Hebrew text makes no mention either of a whale or a shark, speaking only of a "great fish." It was in all probability a miraculous fish, the same as with the miraculous tree in the last chapter. The sceptic and the rationalist, who possess no insight into the word of God except through their scientific spectacles, and whose faith does not go beyond their telescopes and microscopes, object that there is no fish existing with a mouth large enough to swallow a man. As if God, Who created the world out of nothing, could not have prepared a fish large enough to swallow Jonah! "Jehovah prepared" [not "sent"] the miraculous fish. It was even a fish which God had "prepared," we are assured, especially for the occasion, as He did the miraculous tree in the last chapter.

How foolish are the wise men of this world, who say, "Science must shed its light upon the Bible!" They resemble a man who holds up a candle towards the sun, to see whether the sun is shining or not, or a blind mole on the top of his molehill with a pair of spectacles on, and holding an open book, to read it through his spectacles. The famous geologist, Sir Chas. Lyell, had to confess, that in his geological calculations, he had made a mistake of several thousand years. Yet man presumes to make the light of "science, falsely so-called," such as geology or astronomy, the measure of the truth of the word of God! How far wiser was the simple expression of that poor illiterate woman who said, "If it were written that Jonah swallowed the whale, instead of the whale swallowing Jonah, I should believe it, simply because it was written." These are words that may elicit the pitiful smile of the sceptic and the rationalist; yet they are but the expression of the simple faith of a true believer, whose mind and thoughts have been brought into captivity to the Ascended, and therefore to the "written" Christ, that is to the word of God and its infallible authority. Such an one says, "I believe, therefore I see;" whereas unbelief says, "I see, therefore I believe."

I will mention here another of these objections of blind unbelief, which presumes to discover discrepancies and incongruities in that divine book, where faith perceives perfect harmony. These enlightened "friends of light" ("Lichtfreunde"), as they call themselves on the Continent, say, "It is

written in the Bible that the Son of man shall be three days and three nights in the belly of the earth, even as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish. But Jesus was in the grave from Friday evening until Sunday morning, that is scarcely more than one day and two nights. How are we to reconcile such an evident incongruity?

Here, as usually, when attempting to contest the truth of Holy Writ, the "friend of light" only betrays his dark ignorance, not only in divine things, but even in matters of simple history. For it is a well-known fact, that according to the Jewish way of reckoning, any part of the day — the beginning or its close — counted for twenty-four hours. The body of our Lord was laid in the grave on Friday afternoon before six o'clock (the beginning of the sabbath); which according to the Jewish recording counted for one day and one night. During the whole of the following night and day (the sabbath) His body rested in the grave, which was the second day and the second night. And on the third (Sunday) early in the morning He arose, which makes the third day and the third night. None of the Jewish Rabbis, the inveterate enemies of the second part of Holy Writ, and its constant assailants, have ever dared to raise that objection to its truth, as in doing so they would have betrayed their ignorance. It was reserved for modern sceptics (i.e., "seers"), rationalists and "divines," thus to expose their ignorance in divine matters and the irrationalism of their infidelity. But from the follies of men we return to the profitable and divine instructions contained in the second chapter of our prophet.

What a contrast to the tumultuous tempest of the preceding chapter do we find in the silent tomb of the second! There it was the mighty voice of God in the howling storm and the roaring waves, mixed with the cries of the distressed mariners, whilst the prophet was lying in his selfish and unconcerned sleep. But here, we have the stillness of death at the bottom of the sea, and the prophet entombed in the belly of the fish, not asleep but fully aroused in his conscience, to learn those two all-important truths, which God then and there would teach him far away from the eyes of men. From the deep silent grave the prayer of the prophet and his "cry out of the depths" ascend to God. His prayer somewhat reminds us of that of king Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:1-22 :), when death was announced to him, only that in Jonah's case the conflict of soul was much deeper, being at the same time, it seems to me, a prophetic expression of the deep exercise of soul of the future Jewish remnant at the time of antichrist (like Daniel's friends in the fiery furnace), as expressed in the well-known 130th Psalm.

God had cast His disobedient prophet "into the deep," into the midst (lit. "heart") of the sea: the "floods compassed him about," God's "waves and billows passed over him" who was buried alive. From the silent deep the voice of the distressed prophet went up to God's ear, "I am cast out of Thy sight!" But mark, christian reader, what follows. Does God's servant abandon his hope in God? If ever there was a hopeless situation, it was here. Does the prophet give himself up to despair, and lie down for the sleep of death? No. The same gracious but holy God, who had transferred his prophet into the solitude of that unique grave, not to kill him, but to render him, through deep exercise of soul, more fitted for His service, knew also how to strengthen the faith of His apparently cast-away servant, and to fill his heart with confidence in His mercy. Such are His wonderful ways and doings of old. and now, in the Old and in the New Testament. The same voice which exclaims in deepest distress, "I am cast out of Thy sight," continues in the same breath, so to speak, "Yet I will look again toward Thy holy temple." Could the prophet in the belly of the fish look toward the temple of God at Jerusalem? Daniel though far away from the place of that city,

could open his window towards Jerusalem, and turn his face in the direction of the distant place, where once Jehovah's temple had been. But how could Jonah's eyes, in the belly of the fish at the bottom of the sea, have been able to find out the direction of the spot, where at that time the holy city with its glorious temple was still standing? The answer is very simple. The prophet's eye of faith was no doubt looking from the depth of his prison and of his distress straight upwards to a higher temple, to God's sanctuary. He "lifted up his eyes to the hills," from whence alone his help could come and did come. He expected his help from the Lord, "Who has made heaven and earth," as he had confessed Him before the mariners. The waters compassed him about, "even to the soul. The depth closed him round about," and "the weeds were wrapped about his head." He had gone "down to the bottoms of the mountains," and "the earth with her bars" appeared to be "around him for ever." Jonah's "soul fainted within" him and was well nigh giving way to hopeless despair.

Then Jonah "remembered the Lord." His prayer went up and "came in unto Him, into His holy temple." God, Who at a later period bade death and corruption to recede from the sick-bed of the godly king Hezekiah when sick unto death; and He who at a still later period, during His humiliation on earth, called forth His friend Lazarus from the bonds of death and corruption, was able to preserve Jonah's life from the same, and bring him forth again into daylight out of his deep grave. And He did so. God hears the prayer of faith, which addresses itself straight to Him, throwing aside every human prop. The eye of faith looks from everything off unto Jesus, to run in patience the race set before us. And as the needle, whilst trembling from the motions of the ship, ever turns towards the pole, so the heart of the true christian turns to Christ, however it may appear to be moved and wavering under the pressure of daily circumstances. The believer's heart knows but one direction for its movements and aspirations, one refuge only, whither it turns for light and counsel and comfort and help, even God and His dear Son Jesus Christ our Lord (Psalms 46:1-11 ;, Psalms 70:1-5 : — Comp. Acts 4:24-31; Acts 16:25; Revelation 8:3-5). But two great truths Jonah had to learn in the fish's belly, before God could deliver him from the prison of his living tomb. These two truths, all-important for us as for Jonah, we hope to consider, if the Lord will, in the next chapter.

Chapter. 5. 1889 227.

Two Things Learnt in the Fish's Belly.

Two important lessons Jonah learnt in the fish's belly at the bottom of the sea:

1. "They that observe lying vanities, forsake their own mercy;" and 2. "Salvation is of the Lord." . . .

What is the vainest and most delusive of all vanities and delusions? Is it the world around us with lying vanities and vain glories? That was not it which Jonah had to learn; for we may well assume that to God's prophet the world's vanities were too well known for him to observe or regard them. No, the most deceptive of all lying vanities we have not to seek in the outer world, but within ourselves. Our natural heart is that most deceptive of all "lying vanities;" for "deceitful above all things is the heart, and desperately wicked:" who knows it? It is the natural heart with its cunning Jacob's places and designs for the satisfaction of its wretched selfishness, and self-conceit.

Jonah, amidst the constant claims of his prophetic office, always being occupied with others and his position towards them, had not allowed himself sufficient time to learn, in contemplative

solitude, alone with God, and in the light of His presence, the insidious depths of his own evil heart, or he would not have suffered himself to be led away in the vain attempt "to flee from the Lord's presence," and would not have found himself in the fish's belly. This truth, so hard for us to learn, Jacob had learnt after a lifelong humbling experience. Jonah had to learn it at the bottom of the sea, where he had the "sentence of death in himself," that he "might not trust in himself, but in God which raiseth the death." He had to make the same experience as the apostle Paul afterwards, though not in the higher and deeper christian measure of the latter. But even to a servant of God like Paul, the apostle of glory, that lesson could not be spared. Paul, unlike Jonah, made it at first on "terra firma" in Asia (2 Corinthians 1:8),* but later on, like the prophet, in the depth of the sea, on his journey to Rome. He, too, had preferred his own way, though not from the same selfish motive as Jonah. He had gone to Jerusalem instead of to Rome. Therefore the Lord put the chain upon his flesh, and he went to Rome a prisoner, though that circumstance, corrective to the flesh as it was, did not in the least detract from his honourable character as a "prisoner in the Lord." But during that terrible storm Paul no doubt had the "sentence of death" in himself, as he had before in Asia, that he might not trust in himself, but in God, Who raises the dead. He like us, had to spend a second time a season "in the fish's belly," to learn more thoroughly that which he had learnt before, i.e., to renounce his own will, however fair his motives might appear, and commit himself entirely and solely to the will of God, and to His grace in quickening and delivering power. And his prayer, like that of Jonah, came up into God's "holy temple." Not only he himself, but two hundred and seventy-five souls were delivered "from the fish's belly," so to speak, and safely deposited on the shore, though not so gently as was Jonah.

[* Though in Asia not so much by way of discipline.]

Paul, like Jonah, had wrestled with the Lord in fervent prayer, though his conflict of soul was very different from Jonah's in the belly of the fish. The "peace of Christ" was with the apostle during that terrible hurricane; — that peace which is the result of true humiliation and broken self-will and of the heart before the Lord, as was the case with Paul. And never was that quiet superiority of the Lord's true servant in the greatest dangers more strikingly manifested than in the demeanour of the great apostle during that terrific tempest, when for several days neither the sun nor the stars did appear, and all human hope had disappeared. The apostle was in fact the captain both of the ship and of the soldiers. Unto all he gave counsel and encouragement, everybody following his directions.

But, as with Jonah, and even with the apostle, so with every one of us, the having "the sentence of death in ourselves" must be experienced, before that victorious triumphant certainty of faith in the quickening power of God can become our happy practical portion, and render us superior to surrounding difficulties. It is not enough to sing "Created things, though pleasant, Now bear to us death's stamp."

It is a very different thing to "have the sentence of death in ourselves." This we find in the apostle in the first chapter (2 Cor.). Hence we see in each of the following chapters an increasing sense of the quickening power of God and the life of Christ, until in the fifth chapter it culminates in those words, "that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

Sooner or later, every one of us has, like Jonah, to spend a season "in the belly of the fish" (often even several seasons), to learn, like him, that hard and yet so important truth, viz., that "they that

observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy." There is no greater vanity than our wretched self, our naturally deceitful and desperately wicked heart, which always resists the grace and mercy of God towards us or towards others, as was the case with Jonah; mercy — that tender compassionate, divine pity — which never fails to take up those who fear God, and in the consciousness of their own helplessness and weakness make Him their only refuge. But to him, who trusts, like whilom Jacob, in his own plans and schemes and strength, God says, My mercy is for such as are helpless. My wisdom is for those that have become fools in themselves. He takes up those who have "failed in business," 1:e., have become bankrupt in themselves and their own undertakings. But they who have become wise like those Corinthians, and strong and enterprising like Jacob, "are in need of nothing," as Laodicea, and therefore need neither the pity nor the mercy of God, which is reserved for Philadelphia's "weakness." To such God says, Go your own way and see whither it will lead you.

"I dwell in the high and holy place,* with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

[* The "Holy Temple," to which Jonah looked up.]

How true it is, that they who trust in "lying vanities," that is, in their own righteousness, their own character, their own wisdom, strength, and designs, forsake their own grace (as to their inward need), and their own mercies (as to their outward need). Only the grace of our Lord is able to keep and strengthen our inward man, as His power keeps and protects us outwardly. (Compare 2 Timothy 2:1-26 ; 1 Peter 1:5; 1 Peter 4:19; Jude 1:24-25.) The Lord grant us all a deeper, a more constant sense of our entire dependence upon His grace and power, in order that we, in our passage through a cruel and subtle enemy's country towards eternal rest and glory with Christ, quietly and immovably amidst the excitements and commotions of these days, may steadily advance towards the glorious goal of our pilgrimage, in the calm and happy consciousness that for us also Christ's grace is sufficient, and His strength is made perfect in weakness. But there was another no less important truth, which Jonah had to learn in his prison, before he could be delivered from it — a truth, closely connected with the former, viz., that "Salvation is of the Lord." On the surface of the sea, during the mighty storm sent by God, Jonah might learn to fear the Lord and own Him as the God of heaven, Who "made the sea and the dry land." But the great truth, that "Salvation is of the Lord," had to be learnt by him in the depths of the sea, when he had the sentence of death in himself, and, deprived of every human help, had learnt that great truth, that they who observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. As soon as, Jonah thoroughly had learnt that lesson, the second (viz., that salvation is of the Lord) was learnt as a matter of course. When the Israelites had arrived at the Red Sea, with Pharaoh's horsemen and chariots behind, and the Red Sea before them, and every human way of deliverance cut off, then only, for the first time, the words were heard, "Fear not; stand still and see the salvation of the Lord, which He will show unto you." Only when the converted but legal man in Romans 7:1-25 ;, in the "belly of the fish" has entirely come to naught as to his own strength, crying out in despair, "Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death*?" does he perceive that salvation and deliverance must come from the Lord, and exclaim, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord?"

Upon the cry of distress in Exodus 14:1-31 : follows the glorious triumphal song in Exodus 15:1-27 : This is divine order. So it was with Jonah. No sooner had he learnt that "they that observe lying

vanities forsake their own mercy," and that "salvation is of the Lord," than "Jehovah spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land."

How different this vomiting out of Jonah from the "spueing out" of Laodicea, which said, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing," and knew not that she was wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked! The prophet was out of the mouth of the fish vomited upon the shore of safety, but Laodicea will be spued out of the mouth of the Lord for judgment. May God keep us in mercy from that self-sufficient and therefore lukewarm spirit of Laodicea! As many as He loves He rebukes and chastens, even in the "belly of the fish," if necessary!

Chapter 6. 1889 245.

Jesus in the Deep Waters.

Let us now turn again for a few moments from Jonah to Him Who was greater than Jonah, but in immeasurably deeper waters than he. We have considered, in contrast to Jonah, Jesus during the storm in His immovable peace, majesty, and power, and at the same time His loving and tender care for His own. He, the "faithful witness" and "image of the invisible God," Who had made known to sin-benighted men God's heart full of love and grace, whilst His life at the same time had been the perfect pattern and expression of what man ought to be in obedience towards God, had now arrived at the end of His short and perfect earthly career. The world, which was made by Him, had not known Him, and His own had not received Him. Israel's and man's trial generally was about to be closed for ever at the cross, surrounded by Jew and Gentile in common conspiracy. God, "manifested in the flesh," had been here on earth in Christ, "reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing trespasses." But the world would not be reconciled unto God, and Judah's builders rejected the precious foundation stone which God had laid in Zion (Isaiah 28:1-29 :, 1 Peter 2:1-25 :). "They hated Him without a cause," and His gracious invitation, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," drew from the hearts of His people no other response but "Crucify Him!" The bitterest enemies, such as Pilate and Herod, were reconciled to each other, and became friends on the day of His rejection and crucifixion. The world refused to be reconciled to God by the life of the gracious God-Man, spreading blessings wherever He went. The obedient Son of the Father, Who had power to lay down His life, and power to take it again, was now about to crown His obedience in life by His obedience in death, even the death of the cross, that He might, by His death, reconcile hostile sinners to God by believing in that divine love manifested on the cross, where man showed his love for sin and his hatred against God, and where God showed His hatred against sin and His love for the sinner; to overcome, by divine love, the enmity of man, and I make sinners believing exclaim "Nay, but I yield, I yield, I can hold out no more;

I sink, by dying love compelled, and own Thee Conqueror."* [* A way very different to the apostate Roman Emperor Julian.]

Deep indeed were those waters whither the prophet Jonah was sent, when "the waters compassed him about, even to the soul, and the depth closed him round about, and the weeds were wrapped about his head." But deeper, incomparably deeper, were those waters of death into which the obedient Son of God went down for our disobedience. "Deep called unto deep at the voice of God's waterspouts;" when not only the waters of death were beneath and around Him, but

all the waves and billows of God's wrath went over Him.

Wondrous and past finding out are the depths of the counsels of divine wisdom and love and grace and glory. Who can fathom them? But who can say which was deeper, the wisdom of those counsels, or those sufferings on the cross which it required to make good and accomplish them, even the sufferings of Him Who, when dying upon the, cross, bowed His head with the crown of thorns, and said, "It is finished!"

Great was Jonah's distress of soul when he, in his living tomb, deprived of all human help, "out of the belly of Sheol cried unto God," when "his soul fainted within him." But what were those sufferings — deserved sufferings — compared to those on the tree of curse, when the most forsaken of all forsaken ones — forsaken on our behalf! — cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me? Why art Thou so far from helping Me, and from the words of My roaring?" When He was not only forsaken of all His disciples, whom He had called "friends," and at last forsaken by God, but at the same time surrounded by "the assembly of the wicked," all the power, malice, and enmity of Satan and men being let loose against Him. All the poisoned arrows in Satan's full quiver, all the weapons of his immense arsenal were spent upon the holy, gracious, kind, and patient God-Man, when the "Mediator between God and men," as the "Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world" was made sin for all who believe in Him, bearing their sins, when the reproaches of them that reproached God fell upon Him. A solitary death-bed, when the dying one is forsaken of all his friends, relatives, or his servants, is something very melancholy. No voice of comfort or prayer to be heard, no loving sympathising eye near, no tender hand to minister the last beverage, and to wipe the cold sweat from the brow of the departing one, and to close his eyes! Who would wish so to die?

Such a loneliness in death has been the lot of some great men of this world. It was the case with the famous conqueror, Robert of Normandy. The same solitary gloom surrounded the death-bed of the great statesman, William Pitt. A neighbour of the celebrated minister sent a messenger to his house to enquire how he was. He found the gate wide open, and the house-door likewise. The house was deserted and the stillness of death reigned. The messenger proceeded from room to room, until at last he came to the death-chamber, where the lifeless body of the minister was lying on the bed — the sole inhabitant of the stately mansion, the doors of which but a few days since had been besieged by inopportuning flatterers, petitioners, and place-hunters. But however sad such a desolate condition of loneliness when dying may appear in the case of the great of this world, how far more terrible would be the circumstances of the death of such an one if his bed, instead of being lonely and forsaken of all his friends, had been surrounded by his worst enemies — and the great ones of this world have no few of them — each of them doing his best to embitter the last moments of the dying one by the most virulent reproaches, abuses, and insults, and thus increase his dying agony in the most cruel way! "For the credit of humanity" it is presumed that in civilized countries such a case never happens, even the greatest criminal before his execution being treated with every possible attention and regard to his wishes. And has then such a case never happened, kind and philanthropic reader? The cross of the Son of God, the Lord of glory, is the reply to this question. Yonder cross, where the officers and soldiers of the first nation of the then civilized world, together with the highest religious dignitaries of "that nation," which called itself the "people of God," in terrible unison of common hatred against God, and as instruments of the prince of this world, manifested all blackness and enmity of their hearts against God's dear

Son, when God laid upon Him the iniquity of sinners and enemies, that they who believe in Him might be "healed by His stripes." Yes, He was "forsaken" in the most terrible sense of the word, in order that you and I, believing reader, never might experience such a reality of abandonment. He was forsaken by all His own, and — terrible above all — "forsaken of God." Yea, not only forsaken, but surrounded by His enemies, Satan's instruments; surrounded by the "strong bulls of Bashan," which "gaped upon Him with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion." The "dogs compassed Him; the assembly of the wicked inclosed" Him. All the cruel power, malice, and impurity of Satan was let loose against the spotless, meek, and patient Lamb of God.

Easy and comfortable was the prophet's position in the belly of the fish compared to that of his Lord and Master upon the cross, Who became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, and for our disobedience went down into those "deep waters," waters far deeper and far more terrible than those whither Jonah was transferred for his disobedience. But He Who, by His almighty word, released Jonah from the belly of the fish, when Jonah's prayer, his cry from the depths, "came in unto Him, into His holy temple," was Himself delivered by His God, and "heard from the horns of the unicorns." "In the days of His flesh" He "offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him from death, and was heard in that He feared." He Who once was "crucified in weakness" lives now in the power of God, Who "inclined unto Him and heard His cry, and "brought Him up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set His feet upon a rock, and established His goings." When on earth as "Son of Man," He ever was "the faithful witness," indefatigable in the service of His God; and even now, exalted to God's right hand, He continues to encourage and preserve the testimony of grace and truth divine on the earth so beautifully expressed at the close of the Gospel of Mark, which presents Jesus in His character of faithful and indefatigable servant.

"So then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following." May God in His rich grace grant us to become His obedient Son's obedient and willing followers and faithful witnesses, learning at the foot of the cross, what His prophet had to learn in the belly of the fish. For those truths, which Jonah had to learn there and then, are learnt far more thoroughly, blessedly, and fruitfully in the former place than in the latter. We now return to our prophet.

Chapter 7. 1889 260.

Jonah in Nineveh.

Jonah's own will now is broken, and he is thus a fit instrument for delivering Jehovah's message to the inhabitants of Nineveh "And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." God, in His great patience and grace, now repeats the same words of commandment which He had spoken to Jonah the first time. But the prophet had now learnt obedience, that chief requisite for every servant. What a difference between the third verse of the third chapter of Jonah and the same verse of the first! In the latter we read, "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down unto Joppa." How different in the third chapter! "So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord." It was the same Jehovah, Who nine centuries later laid prostrate in the dust the high-spirited Saul of Tarsus (when he, like a

furious lion, breathing out threatenings and slaughter, was on his way to Damascus), and made him say, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" and said to him, "Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things, which are appointed for thee to do."

Whatever might have been the infirmities of the prophet Jonah, cowardice was none of them, as observed already. He possessed great courage of faith, which we saw him manifesting during that terrible storm. The same courage of faith which he had shown at sea he now shows on the land. "Nineveh," we read, "was an exceeding great city of three days' journey," 1:e., of three days in diameter. And when reading at the close of the book, that it contained no less than one hundred and twenty thousand infants, "that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand," it will not be difficult to arrive at an estimate of the whole of the population of that "exceeding great city," immense for those days. But it was not only the size but the "wickedness" of that proud and mighty city, referred to by Jehovah Himself in the first chapter, which the prophet naturally had to dread. If now-a-days, in a civilised world, which calls itself christian, the gospel messengers of Christ and the witnesses of His truth, according to their faithfulness in their testimony and walk, have to expect opposition, scorn and persecution, what could Jehovah's prophet expect from a city, the wickedness of which had come up before God, ripe for judgment? It was not the message of peace and salvation through the rich grace of God, for the greatest sinner who repents and believes in Jesus, together with the warning to flee from the wrath to come, which Jonah had to announce to the inhabitants of that ungodly city. His message was, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." What kind of reception had the bearer and proclaimer of such a message to expect from such a people? Nothing but affront, and mockery, prison and death. But the same courage of faith, which had characterised the prophet during the storm and even in his terrible prison at the bottom of the sea, whilst in the path of disobedience (though confessing and repenting of it), distinguished him now, when in the narrow and dangerous yet safe path of obedience. "And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." From house to house, from street to street, Jehovah's fearless prophet proceeds with his solemn message. Before the door of the poorest hovel, and before the gate of the rich, and at the portals of the palaces of the king and his great men, his warning voice is heard, announcing the approaching judgment. For "there is no difference, all have sinned."

God's power and blessing accompanied the message of His obedient servant. The busy hum of the bazaars is interrupted by the warning call, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." Buyers and sellers cease from their bargain. The workmen leave their workshops to listen to those ever-repeated solemn notes of the prophet. The pleasure-seekers forsake their dances and games; the drunkards start up from their carousing, and the voluptuous from their couches; for like a trumpet of judgment the terrible words sound in their ears, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." And not in their ears only. They sank down into their hearts and consciences like barbed arrows, fixed there by the Spirit of God. The thief, the robber and the murderer, leave the works of darkness, for judgment is at hand. The solemn voice of the prophet has reached even their hardened consciences. Even the idol-priests forsake the now empty temples and their false gods, which have ears and hear not, eyes and see not, feet and go not. The word sent by God enters as a two-edged sword into the consciences and hearts of the inhabitants of Nineveh. Before the prophet has reached the heart of the city, his solemn message has spread with the rapidity of

lightning over the immense metropolis. "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them." Their repentance was genuine. They did not say, "Forty days yet?" delaying their repentance till the last, nor did they wait for the decree of the king and his nobles to put on sackcloth. Everything was done spontaneously, because it was the work of God. The royal decree was only the seal and the proof that the work was general, extending from the highest to the least. The solemn message sent by God found its entrance even into the king's palace. That invisible power, which wrote upon the walls of Belshazzar's festive hall those solemn words, "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin," and made "his knees smite one against another," moved, by the words of the prophet, the heart of the king of Nineveh, and entered into his conscience. Like Belshazzar and his great men at Babylon, so trembled the king of Nineveh and his lords. But their fear, unlike that of Belshazzar and his great men, led to a repentance not to be repented of. It was the "fear of the Lord," which "is the beginning of wisdom," which makes wise unto salvation by taking heed to His word, and by which men "depart from evil."

"For word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water: but let man and beast be covered with sack-cloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands." It might, perhaps, appear strange to some, that even the cattle, herd and flock, should have been constrained to take part in the fasting. What had the poor dumb animals done to be forced to such an involuntary abstinence? The reason appears to be simply this. Where God begins his work of repentance in the soul of a sinner, sin becomes known and judged not merely as to its fruits — 1:e. sins or evil works — but as to its root and inward character. An instance of this we find in Psalms 51:1-19 : There the penitent king of Israel, who had been more faithful when a shepherd than when he was a king (after the God-sent word of the prophet Nathan, "Thou art the man!" had, like a sharp arrow, pierced his heart and conscience, and placed him in God's holy presence), not only confesses his great transgressions and sins, 1:e., what he had done, but what he is. He not only judges the bad fruits of the bad tree, but the bad tree itself. Not by way of a light excuse, but in thorough self-judgment, he says, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me." He lays the axe to the root of the tree, to judge not his parents and progenitors, but himself. So it was at Nineveh, only that there it was the effect rather than the root of sin. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." Where God works repentance in a soul, He first shows to the sinner what sin is in His sight, and then the effects of the evil and its terrible extent, and afterwards the root of it. In the first chapters of the Epistle to the Romans up to the middle of the fifth chapter, the bad fruits of the bad tree, sins, are dealt with. Thence, until chapter 8:, the root of the tree, sin. In the eighth chapter, besides, the effect of sin (not merely of sins as to the sinner) upon a groaning creation, travailing in pain, and subject to vanity and to the bondage of corruption for man's sake, is recalled to our humbling notice. And not only does creation groan under the outward effects of sin, but the poisonous influence of it has affected its inmost parts. Sin has permeated the whole creation and corrupted everything. The passions of anger and strife, envy, greediness, vengeance and violence, we perceive throughout the whole animal world around us, from the ferocious lion down to the little angry bee, from the tame dog to the rapacious wolf. Through the microscope we perceive in a single drop of water

thousands of tiny animalculae, invisible to the naked eye, pursuing and consuming each other. The "right of the stronger" exists not only amongst men, but amongst animals, from the eagle amid air and the mute tribes of the deep down to the animalcule in a drop of water. In the millennial kingdom, beneath the sceptre of the "Prince of Peace" and "King of Righteousness," at the time of the "liberty of the glory of the children of God," the whole creation, now groaning and travailing together in pain, and "in earnest expectation waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God," shall be "delivered from the bondage of corruption. Then "the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play at the holes of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den," whilst Satan himself, "that old serpent," shall be "shut up in the bottomless 'pit." The fruits of sin, 1:e., sins, are easily perceived by men, and judged and punished too, as far as they become injurious to human society. But it is astonishing to see, how little, even amongst Christians, sin in its real nature and its in every way pernicious effect is being recognised and judged and condemned. The edict of the king of Nineveh and his nobles might serve us for an example in this respect. For that decree, extending even to the cattle in the city, showed at all events how deep and real was the feeling of repentance, wrought in them by God through His prophet, and how true the sense and judgment of sin in its nature and extensive effect. But this was not all. The royal edict concluded with these words, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not?" The same Spirit of grace and truth, Who produces in the sinner the recognition and confession of his sins against God, and makes him in his conscience feel the burden of them in God's holy presence, at the same time inspires the penitent heart of the sinner with confidence in God's mercy and grace. Whilst his burdened conscience would keep him at a distance from God, his heart, moved by the gentle and tender Spirit of grace, draws him towards God. Both the Old and the New Testaments furnish us with many instances of this wondrous operation of the Spirit of truth and of love. (Psalms 25:11, Psalms 51:1; Daniel 9:8-9; Luke 5:8; comp. John 6:68, Luke 18:13, and many other passages.) The same effect of the Spirit of God we perceive in the remarkable edict of the king of Nineveh. But at the same time its closing words, "Who can tell, whether God will turn," etc., remind us of the words of a greater king than he, I mean king David, whose genuine deep repentance, expressed in the fifty-first Psalm, has just been alluded to. David's child, the fruit of his terrible sin, was about to die. The king, prostrate in the dust before God with fasting and praying, tearfully besought God for the life of the child, for he said, "Who can tell, whether Jehovah may be gracious to me, that the child may live?" But his prayer could not be granted; the fruit of sin must die. With the king of Nineveh it was otherwise. For however great his and his people's sins had been, David's sin was incomparably greater, according to the measure of the truth revealed to him, and of the divine favour and privileges and blessings bestowed upon him. Nineveh's repentance was real. It was a general awakening to such an immense extent and reality, as is without parallel in the Old Testament, except, perhaps, on the occasion of Israel's return to Jehovah on the mount of Carmel (1 Kings 18:1-46 :), and, though in a smaller measure, in the days of the apostles at Saron and Lydda, and thirty years ago in Ireland.

What a sight! Thousands and thousands of penitent sinners, in sackcloth and ashes lying in the dust before God, deploring their sins, from the king and his great men down to the lowest criminal and to the poorest beggar. From that immense scene of general corruption and violence, vast and

numberless sounds of mourning and weeping now ascend to heaven, mingled with the lowing, moaning, and groaning of the fasting and suffering beasts. And as to men, those sounds were not mere signs of an outward repentance. They were accompanied by "fruits meet for repentance." God, who searcheth the hearts and reins, saw that Nineveh's repentance was genuine.

"And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that He had said that He would do unto them; and He did it not." In cases of repentance, God deals with nations as He does with individuals. Where He sees real repentance in departing from evil, He also repents of the evil,* that is, of His threatened judgment upon the evil, and punishment being no longer necessary, He does not carry it out.

[* God is not a man, that He should repent as to His eternal and unchangeable counsels and unconditional promises, which "are without repentance." But in His grace He may repent of, 1:e., not carry out, a threatened judgment, as in the case of Nineveh. We must remember, that the Spirit of God condescends to express Himself after the human way of speaking, on account of our infirmities.] At the time when cholera first appeared in England, spreading death and consternation, a great mortality took place in one of the emporiums of commerce. Thousands fell a prey to the plague. The magistrate of the city then appointed a certain day for general humiliation and prayer. The same day the last case of death by cholera took place, and soon the plague ceased. Not many years afterwards England was visited with the murrain or cattle-plague. Whole districts were almost denuded of cattle. With every day the distress increased. The government then appointed a day for national humiliation and prayer before God. From that day the cattle-plague decreased and soon disappeared. As a sad counterpart of the facts referred to, but all the more solemn confirmation of the principle of truth just mentioned with regard to God's righteous government, we refer to the short, but terrible war between two great European powers not many years ago. The issue of that war, in its remarkable incidents without parallel in the annals of history, may be ascribed by the strategists and politicians of this world to the great strategic superiority of the leaders, or the greater physical strength of the soldiers and the national enthusiasm, or the superior commissariat, etc., of the victorious army. But the eye, enlightened by faith and the word of God, sees farther and deeper than natural ken, recognising the true reason for the unexampled success of that war in two simple facts, which enabled one at the beginning of the war to foretell its expected result. Those two facts were, that at the very outset the ruler of the victorious nation, alike with the people, recognised God and their dependence upon Him as to every success, whilst on the part of their opponents scarcely any mention was made of Him; and secondly, because the cause, for which the victorious army fought, was a just one.* God, the leader of battles, was with those who recognised Him and whose cause was a just one, and gave them victory upon victory, till at last the victorious army appeared before the gates of the capital of the conquered enemy — the "Nineveh" of this age. But unlike Nineveh of old, there was no repentance nor penitence, nor fruits meet for repentance, no sign of national humiliation before God. Prayers there were many, but they were offered up before idol-shrines. The heavier the blows of divine judgment fell upon them, the more closely they clung to their idols. (Of course, this refers to the nation in general, for the prayers of real Christians in that country could not avert the judgment of the impenitent nation as such). It happened to them again, what the prophet Isaiah had prophesied of Egypt, "Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence, and the heart of the people shall melt in the

midst of it. And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbour; . . . and the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof, and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards" (Isaiah 19:1-3).

[* We must remember, that here it is not a question of Christianity, but of the righteous government of God in dealing with this world.] At last a spectacle, unheard of in history, presented itself. The capital, having been surrendered and afterwards vacated by the victorious army, was besieged by its own citizens and compatriots, entrenched within the camp of their common enemy. As in the camp of the Midianites of old they slew one another, the victorious people of God witnessing the unnatural spectacle from the heights of the surrounding forts occupied by him.

God's ways in His sovereignty and government are the same with nations as with individuals. He Who once spoke, "Hast thou seen how Ahab hath humbled himself?" dealt in mercy with penitent Nineveh as He did in judgment with the modern impenitent one. He resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. And what of Jonah? Obedient to the will of God he had discharged his solemn duty. His conscience had been reached, and his will broken, but not his heart. Not a single tear, when he announced to young and old in that great city the terrible judgment of God; not a single trace of pity and sympathy with the imminent awful doom of those numberless fellow-creatures of his. But more of this in the next chapter when "Jesus, weeping over Jerusalem," will be the subject of our meditation.

Chapter 8. 1889 276.

Jesus Weeping over Jerusalem.

"And when He was come near, He beheld the city and wept over it, saying: If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things, which belong unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19:41-44).

What a different scene from that spoken of in our preceding chapter! There we heard Jehovah's prophet announcing the impending divine judgment to the then world's capital, hardened in sin and wickedness. We saw the immediate and general effect of the God-sent warning upon its inhabitants, and God (Whose natural work is grace, and judgment His strange work) sparing the penitent city. But here we behold, not Jehovah's prophet, obedient and courageous, yet without a sign of compassion with those whose doom he had announced, but Jehovah Himself, Zion's King, presenting Himself to the city of David, whose Son He was. And how did He appear at the gates of that city, so privileged with all kinds of temporal and religious blessings, where once the queen of Sheba had done homage to king Solomon and admired his wisdom? How did He, Who was greater than Solomon, appear before the gates of Jerusalem? Was it in His war like apparel, with His "vesture dipped in blood," as "King of kings" and "Lord of lords," with His "sharp sword" at the head of His "heavenly armies" on the "white horses" of victory, as He will appear at a not very distant time for the battle of Armageddon, when His enemies will be made His footstool? No, the "Prince of peace," approached the "city of peace," in the humble peaceful train foretold by the

prophet Zechariah, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee. He is just and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass."*

[* The Lord really did not ride upon the ass, the beast of burden, used to the yoke, and symbol of the old covenant under the law of Moses, but on the "colt," which had not been under the yoke nor borne any burden, being a symbol of the new covenant. Only in the Gospel of Matthew the ass and the colt are mentioned, in keeping with the character of that Gospel. In Mark, Luke and John, only the "colt" appears, from the additional reason of its having not borne yet the yoke of sinful man (comp. Genesis 49:14).] But alas! the city of peace "knew not the things which belong to her peace." She knew not "the time of her visitation." That happy moment, when all Israel will burst into the glorious song of praise, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord," had not yet come. Only the baby and the multitude of His disciples sung this song in happy anticipation of that moment: even "the stones would have cried out," if they had been silent. But the hearts of the builders at Jerusalem were harder than the stones of their streets. They rejected the Stone which God had laid in Zion, for He was to them a Stone of stumbling. Their hard unfeeling voices interrupted the sweet harmony of the song of praise from Christ's disciples with the shrill sound, "Master, rebuke thy disciples." What blindness! What insolence against the "King of Zion," Who by the few words, "I am He," laid prostrate Judas and the whole band. But the perfect harmony of the meek and lowly heart of the King with the daughter of Zion could not be disturbed even by such a rude interruption. His only reply to the blind leaders of the people was, "I tell you, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." And when Jesus then beheld the city, whose leaders had given Him such a reception, had their treatment chilled His affections for the "beloved city?" He wept over Jerusalem. He knew, that the same multitude now thronging around Him and chiming in with the "Hosanna" of His disciples, would, after a few days, clamour for His death, shouting, "Crucify Him! crucify Him!" Did this restrain His tears? No, it only called them forth, on account of the terrible judgment, which was impending over Jerusalem, after the last testimony of the wondrous grace and the longsuffering of God should have been rejected by their stoning His martyr Stephen. That judgment He was about to pronounce over the unhappy blinded city. It was a judgment still more terrible than that pronounced upon Nineveh by the prophet Jonah, just as Jerusalem's crowning sill was incomparably greater than all the sins of Nineveh had been. "And when He was come near, He beheld the city and wept over it."

Oh, what tears were these, christian reader! Precious as were those tears which the "Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief," wept at the grave of His friend Lazarus, no less precious were these which Jehovah-Jesus wept over that city, whose sole response to all the blessings she had received of Him was the tree of curse and the cup of gall and vinegar. The land, which, after the rain which had "oft come upon it," had brought forth no fruit but a crown of thorns for Him, Who sent down the rain, and had in His own person watered that land for more than three years with showers of blessings, was now "nigh unto cursing," and its "end to be burned." Nothing but judgment remained. But the tears of the Judge preceded the pronouncement of the judgment.

Some years ago a very affecting scene took place at some court of assizes in this country. The judge had to pronounce sentence of death upon a young person of respectable family, who had committed murder. But the circumstances connected with that misdeed were of a nature so affecting and appealing to human sympathy, that all present in that densely crowded judgment hall

were deeply moved. And when the fatal word, "guilty," had been pronounced, and the judge put on the "black cap," and proceeded to pronounce sentence of death upon the young culprit, he hid, overcome by his feelings, his face in the sleeves of his black gown, and then, with a voice hoarse with emotion, pronounced the fatal sentence. In that hall scarcely a tearless eye was to be seen on that occasion, from the judge and the jurymen down to the roughest in the crowd of spectators.

We honour such a judge whose stern office had not made him forget to feel humanely. But in that case there were "extenuating circumstances" of such weight, that they deeply moved the judge's heart, and produced, on the part of the jury, a strong commendation to royal mercy, which was granted. But could any "extenuating circumstances" be found in the case of Jerusalem? The parable of the vineyard is the answer to that question. The servants, whom the Master of the vineyard had sent from time to time, to receive the fruits thereof, had been beaten, killed, and stoned by the husbandmen. At last the Master had sent His Son, saying, "they will reverence him." But the husbandmen said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance." "And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him." That terrible moment had arrived, and to the Son of the Master of the vineyard nothing was left but to pronounce upon the blinded and hardened city its imminent terrible judgment, but not before He had wept over her, to whom already before (Matthew 23:37) He had addressed, in the wonderful and magnificent language of Jehovah, those solemn parting words: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. Verily I say unto you, ye shall not see Me, until the time come, when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Those words of Jesus, "how often?" are the answer to the plaintive question, "how long?" pervading the whole of the prophetic part of the Old Testament, in the Psalms and the Prophets. When the wrath of God was "smoking over the sheep of His pasture," and "the enemy had done wickedly in the sanctuary (roared in the midst of His congregations, and set up his ensigns for signs, and broke down the carved work at once with axes and hammers, and cast fire into the sanctuary," leaving a scene of desolation), the most hopeless of all these circumstances after all was this, that "there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long." Even in the greatest calamity there remains some consolation so long as the end of it can be foreseen, and somebody is at hand who can tell how long it will last. When the prophet Isaiah was charged by Jehovah with the solemn warning message of judgment concerning Judah and Jerusalem, which overwhelmed his heart as the glory and holiness of Jehovah just before had overwhelmed his conscience, he exclaimed sorrowfully, "How long, O Lord?" as much as to say, "How long is that terrible moral condition of heart of Thy and My own people to continue? O Lord, surely thou wilt not exterminate Thy people, till none remain?" The Lord's answer is, "Till the result of their obstinacy has taken place, "Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate, and the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land." Then the promise of a "remnant" is given to the prophet. "But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return, and shall be eaten; as a teil tree and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance thereof." That judgment, announced by Jehovah's prophet, was first accomplished by the carrying away of Judah into the Babylonian captivity. According to His promise, given to His

prophet, God sent in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah a remnant from the captivity back to Canaan, to rebuild Jerusalem. But even this "tenth" was again to be "eaten," 1:e., despoiled through a judgment more terrible than those that preceded; for the descendants of those Jews who had returned from Babylon sinned still more than their fathers. They were the husbandmen to whom the Son was sent, and who cast Him out of the vine-yard and killed Him. The same "King, Jehovah of hosts," who had announced that judgment to His people by the mouth of His prophet Isaiah (John 12:41), now weeps over Jerusalem, but at the same time announces the impending judgment to the blinded city. His answer to the "How long?" of His prophets now is "How often." "How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings; and ye would not." Then He takes up the thread where he had left it, in Isaiah 6:1-13 : There He had replied to the prophet's question, "How long?" with, "Until the cities be desolate, and the houses without men," etc. That "until" referred to judgment. But in His touching mourning over Jerusalem Jehovah-Jesus begins where He had ended in His answer to Isaiah. He says, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate;" and then concludes with a gracious "until," at the final blessing at the glorious return of Him, the once rejected King Messiah, when His people, delivered from the terrible dominion of the false Messiah, will burst forth into the jubilant exclamation of homage, "Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord."

Yes, we repeat, Blessed be He Whose coming again we may now expect daily, nay, hourly, to take us, together with all that are His, up into His Father's house. Thither He has gone before to prepare a place for us, and there we shall be for ever with Him, in the full uninterrupted enjoyment of His love and grace, praising and appreciating it better than we have done here below, and whence we shall appear with Him and all His saints to reign with Him over this earth. Then the holy heavenly Jerusalem will, as a gloriously adorned bride, descend with Christ; and the earthly Jerusalem, then no longer to be wept over, but beloved and holy Jerusalem, will be an unenvious eye-witness of unheard-of earthly blessings, following upon unprecedented sufferings, "since there was a nation." These blessings will be showered down by Jehovah upon her, then no longer a separate and desolate one, but restored to His full favour, when He who once wept over her, will say to her "Thou art fair, my love, there is no spot in thee." And she will answer, "Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my Beloved come into His garden, and eat His pleasant fruits."

Beloved, may we, to whom it is given, then to appear with Christ, to reign with Him over the then blessed earth, as His bride, the "Lamb's wife," and to be witnesses of the re-acceptance, on the part of Jehovah, of His earthly people, when Isaiah's vision will have become a blessed reality, and heaven and earth be united in blessed and undisturbed union — may we walk worthy of our high calling, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love. It is not enough to announce, like Jonah, with the bold and courageous voice of faith, but with an indifferent and cool heart, to sinful "Nineveh" her approaching judgment; it is a very different thing to "weep over Jerusalem." It is all right, like the apostle of grace and glory, "knowing the terror of the Lord, to persuade men," but something more, like him, "constrained by the love of Christ, to beseech in Christ's stead, Be reconciled to God!" The God of all grace give to His messengers of "peace by the blood" of His dear Son, not only the voice of Jonah, but also the heart of Paul, and the tears of his and our meek and lowly Master!

Part 2. — What Jonah Learnt Under the Gourd.

Chapter 9. 1889 310. The Gourd. — Four Trees.

We now come to the second and much harder lesson, which the prophet had to learn under that miraculous tree, commonly called the gourd. It was a wondrous tree indeed, not only on account of the suddenness of its origin and decay, but because of the wonderful scene which took place at its foot between Jehovah and His prophet. It was very different from that between Jehovah and His faithful and yet so tender-hearted servant Abraham (Gen. xviii). In the latter we behold Abraham soliciting Jehovah's pardon for Sodom, that ungodly city, which showed no trace of repentance, but the very opposite. Here, on the contrary, we hear Jehovah's prophet murmuring at the grace and pardon granted to penitent Nineveh.

"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the Lord, and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. Then said the Lord, Doest thou well to be angry?" Here the real motive of Jonah's flight, recorded in the first chapter, comes out. The prophet makes no secret of it. In Chapter 1 I have commented already upon Jonah's terribly selfish motive, and therefore need not here enter again upon it.

What language on the part of a prophet towards God, and of a servant towards his supreme and sovereign Lord! Jonah's self-will, indeed, had been broken. But of what avail is a broken will, without a heart broken under the sense of pardoning divine grace and redeeming love? A broken will may fit us for serving the Lord, but only a broken heart fits us for suitable service, as has been truly observed. How soon Jonah had forgotten his distress and prayer in the fish's belly, and his deliverance from the terrible prison! Then he could not thank God enough for having saved him from the "belly of the grave." And now, when the same saving or sparing divine grace is to be extended to a whole city with numberless penitent inhabitants, he murmurs against that grace. And why? Because he thought that, through the remittance of the judgment announced by him, his prophecy and consequently his character as prophet would be compromised. Rather let a whole city perish, and millions of souls be hurled into eternity and hell, than a prophet be discredited!

Oh, what a terrible thing is the desperately wicked unbroken heart, even when self-will has been tamed and broken in! How often does it happen that in the fiery furnace of trial, under God's chastening hand, the will appears to be broken, without the sinful heart with its selfish and idolatrous inclinations having really been judged in God's presence. The consequence is, that when the trial is over, the evil root in the heart, having never been cut to the quick by the knife of self-judgment, produces fresh shoots, and soon bears its sad fruits. So it was with Jonah. Rather die, than live as a discredited prophet. How patient and longsuffering is God's answer, "Doest thou well to be angry?" Jehovah deals graciously and tenderly with His downhearted and murmuring servant, intending to deal not only with his conscience, but with his heart. How calculated His whole way of procedure in this last chapter to accomplish that gracious purpose.

"So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city." Even after the forty days had elapsed, he evidently could not bring himself to believe that Jehovah would entirely disown his prophecy, and thus expose His prophet. He clearly still entertained some lingering

hope that God would at least in some, though less severe, way visit Nineveh with judgment. So he builds a booth on the east side of Nineveh and settles down in expectation of some judgment to come. The "Lord of glory," Who so gently dealt here with His discontented and grumbling prophet, was Himself crucified nine hundred years later, on the west side of Jerusalem, to bear the judgment due to Jonah's people and to us. The sun of God's favour and mercy, which for more than a thousand years had shone upon that city, was then setting. And whilst those hands which had fed thousands of hungry ones and healed countless sufferers, and those blessed indefatigable feet which had served to carry the heavenly Messenger of peace from place to place, when He was "going about doing good," and delivering them that were oppressed by the devil, were about to be nailed by cruel hands to the cross, there went up to God from the heart and lips of the crucified Messiah and "King of the Jews" that marvellous intercession, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

What a prayer at such a moment, christian reader! It could only come from Him, Who had wept over Jerusalem. His martyr Stephen prayed afterwards in the spirit of his Master, but he could only do so on account of the cross and victory of that blessed One. Reader! how much have we imbibed of the spirit of that same gracious Master, Who says, "Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you?"

Jonah knew very little of the spirit of his Master, when murmuring in the east of Nineveh against divine grace, whilst the sun of God's mercy had just risen shining upon the penitent city. But God, "Who is good and whose mercy endureth for ever," gives to His poor servant a fresh proof of His kind provision and care, to soothe his grief. A new link in the chain of His wise providence now appears. "And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd." The hasty and disappointed prophet soon subsides into the enjoyment of his boon, and whilst enjoying its cool shade he makes himself as comfortable as he can in his sad post of observation.

There are especially four trees in holy Writ which with regard to our subject are full of instruction. Two of them we find in the Old, and two in the New Testament. The two former are "trees of grumbling," for in the persons connected with the two we behold the fruit of "Meribah." The two latter we may call "trees of blessing," perceiving in the two persons associated with them the fruits of true and fervent prayer and looking for the Saviour. The first of these four trees is the "juniper tree" with the grumbling prophet Elijah beneath its branches. The second is the miraculous tree or "gourd" in Jonah 4:1-11 : with the murmuring prophet Jonah in its shadow. The third is the "fig tree" (John 1:1-51 :) with Nathanael praying at the foot of it; and fourthly the "sycamore tree" with the searching Zacchaeus in its top. Beneath which of these four trees is the christian reader mostly to be found? Is it the two "grumbling trees" of the Old, or the two "trees of blessing" of the New Testament? A few remarks on each of them may, under God's blessing, be profitable for some of us. The Juniper Tree and the Gourd. The first of these two trees we find in 1 Kings 19:1-21 : Elijah, that faithful prophet and "man of God," had just before (ch. 18:) glorified God by his courage of faith. In that unique scene of heroic faith and decision for God he had served as an instrument of His grace to restore apostate and idolatrous Israel and bring them back to Jehovah as the only true God. But Satan did not rest. He sought to occupy the prophet with self and with the act of

unexampled heroism Elijah had performed on that grand occasion. In that attempt the tempter appears to have succeeded but too well, as Elijah's own words clearly prove (ver. 10). Peter's self-confidence was followed by Peter's cowardice. After the cutting off the ear comes the denial. Such has been the natural order before and since the days of Elijah and Peter until now. Peter dreaded the words of the high priest's maid, and Elijah became alarmed at the words of the wicked queen, Jezebel. We find him in the wilderness, under the "juniper tree," praying God (almost in the same words as, forty years after, did the prophet Jonah) to "take away his life." But the same pitiful and merciful God, Who gave to Jonah the cooling shadow of that miraculous tree to soothe his disappointment, sent His angel with food and drink, to refresh His discouraged prophet under the juniper tree. But after arriving at the foot of Horeb, the "mount of God," Elijah has to listen to the humbling question, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" Was this the place for a prophet of God? His post was at the gates of the city; in the market place; or at the entrance of the temple; or wherever the concourse of the people was most numerous, and consequently the testimony of divine truth most public, decided, and dangerous. What a difference in Elijah's position in ch. 18: from that in ch. 19:! And what was the prophet's reply to the heart-searching question of his divine Master? Does he humble himself, confessing his want of faithfulness and of courage and of faith? No. His language is that of self-elevation and accusing others, as is always the case when a believer departs from the path of obedience and refuses to judge himself and to confess his sin. Elijah says, "I have been very jealous for Jehovah, the God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." These words betrayed in a threefold way the prophet's unhappy state of soul, viz., (1.) Self-exaltation.

(2.) Unjust accusation against God's people, whom he charges with idolatry and persecution against God's prophets. Why, they had just turned away from their idols, and returned to the true and living God, and assisted the prophet in killing the priests of Baal.

(3.) Utter want of fellowship, in the sense of Malachi 3:16, with God's faithful remnant in Israel. There were seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed their knees to Baal, and Elijah did not know one of them.

How true it is that he who exalts himself only abases himself. Whilst accusing others, he accuses and condemns himself; his own lips betray and judge him. Far be it from me by these remarks to cast any disparaging reflection upon that faithful servant of God! Never since the days of Moses had God been so glorified by any of His servants, as in that wondrous scene of fearless faithfulness and victory over Satan, recorded in the eighteenth chapter of the First Book of Kings. But Elijah had failed to do what we also so frequently fail to do, in the combat of faith against the hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places, viz., to "stand, after having withstood in the evil day" (Eph. vi). Like Moses, he had also failed in not rendering the glory to God above all.

All this has been written "for our admonition." God afterwards honoured His faithful prophet. Like Enoch, he did not see death, being caught up to heaven in the fiery chariot. But before that he had to learn a humbling yet blessed lesson on Horeb, the same "mount of God," at whose foot the "God of glory and grace" had appeared to His servant Moses in the "burning," yet not "burnt," bush. God, Who on Sinai, the mount of the law, had caused "all His goodness" to pass before Moses, when Moses asked to see His glory, causes on Horeb, the "mount of God," the heralds of

His power — the "great and mighty wind," the "earthquake," and the "fire" — to pass before the terrified prophet, who was glad "in the crushing sense of his nothingness" to hide himself in the farthest corner of a cavern before the terrible effect of the power of these mere heralds of divine majesty. But God Himself was neither in the wind, nor in the earthquake, nor in the fire. But after the fire there came a "still small voice," the voice of God's grace. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, Which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." No sooner does the terrified prophet hear that "still small voice," than he wraps his face in his mantle, and comes to the entrance of the cave, to approach God. Is it not the same tender voice that speaks to the sinner penitent and crushed, but believing, "Your sins will I remember no more," after this world had rejected and crucified Him, Who in His own Person was that "still small voice" when "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing trespasses?" And does not the same "still small voice" bid the once rebellious sinner, but now worshipper and saint, who, through the blood of Jesus has liberty to enter the holiest, to "draw nigh with a true heart?" Blessed be His glorious and gracious name! But the full grace of God in Christ was unknown to Elijah, though he felt the sweet attraction of that gracious voice, and, in an outward way, approached God, freed from fear. Again, that voice of longsuffering grace spoke, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" It was the same voice that said in Paradise, "Adam, where art thou?" Alas! Elijah's heart had been only delivered from fear, but not softened, by that "still small voice." Again we hear the same lamentable reply, "I have been very zealous," etc. The prophet had learnt little or nothing. He could make the fire come down from heaven upon the enemies of God and of His truth, but had not yet understood that after the fire comes the "still small voice" of grace, and that judgment is God's "strange work," but grace His "natural work." Alas! how much does the religious natural heart in its graceless Jehu-zeal resemble that of Elijah, even in the two brothers Boanerges, the "sons of thunder!" (Luke 9:54.) No sooner has the same answer the second time escaped Elijah's lips, than Jehovah commands him to return on his way to the wilderness of Damascus, and anoint not only two kings for Syria and Israel, but also another prophet in his (Elijah's) stead. Like Moses, the founder of the law, so Elijah, the restorer of the law, had fallen short of the glory of God and of His grace. Like Moses, Elijah was no longer to remain in his office, but had to transfer it to a successor, who better knew how to enter upon the grace of God and to act in the spirit of it.

Before resuming our meditations on Jonah under the gourd, a few remarks on the third and fourth of our four trees under consideration.

3. The Fig Tree. The small group of believing Israelites, whom we behold in the second part of the First Chapter of John, who were waiting for the Messiah announced by John the Baptist, His forerunner, possessed one blessed quality common to all of them. They were looking out for the promised Messiah. They sought and found. "We have found the Messiah," says Andrew to his brother Simon. "We have found Him, of Whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph," Philip exclaims to Nathanael. Nathanael like them had searched the Scriptures, for he answers Philip, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?"* But he had done something else. Before Philip brought him to Jesus, he had been "under the fig-tree" alone with Jehovah-Jesus, in deep exercise of soul. His utterances might have borne the character of words like these, "Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens, that Thou. wouldst come down, that the mountains might flow down at Thy presence . . . For since the beginning of the

world men have not heard nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him. Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness; those that remember Thee in Thy ways. Behold, Thou art wroth; for we have sinned; in those is continuance, and we shall be saved. But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." . . . But now, O Lord, Thou art our Father; we are the clay, and Thou art the Potter; and we are all the work of Thy hand. Be not wroth very sore, O Jehovah, neither remember iniquity for ever; behold, see, we beseech Thee, we are all Thy people" (Isaiah 64:1-9).

[* "Search and look, for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John 7:52).]

Certainly, on that tree there were not merely "green leaves." The Lord found there at least one ripe, good fruit — "an Israelite without guile." And what a reward did Nathanael receive from the Lord! Jesus reveals Himself to him not only as the Messiah as He did to the others. Nathanael exclaims, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel." He had sought, and he had found; he had asked, and it was given to him; he had knocked, and it was opened to him.*

[* When at the university we sat at the feet of such a "Nathanael," who had put on the "new man," not only by his name but in deed, after he had found "Christ," and became one of the most celebrated writers on church history. When studying at the University of Gottingen, he one day looked at the New Testament in the original. He opened the book at the beginning of the Gospel of St. John, and read the first verse, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "Eureka!" ("I have found!") he exclaimed. Those few words had disclosed to him the glory of Him to Whom Nathanael at the end of that wondrous chapter says, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; Thou art the King of Israel." What a poor "Eureka," compared to this, was that of Archimedes when he made his famous scientific discovery!]

What a blessedly instructive tree is that fig-tree, christian reader! Though it was but a Jewish "fig-tree," one can but fervently desire that we might be more continually found under it engaged like Nathanael, before Philip called him to introduce him to the personal presence of Him with Whom Nathanael had been engaged in the Spirit under that tree. Thus from the fig-tree the faithful Israelite was brought to the "apple-tree" — Christ (Solomon's Song of Solomon 2:3). He "sat down under His shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to his taste," just as he himself to his Master had been a refreshing fruit of the fig-tree. Would God, I repeat, we were, like Nathanael, engaged in the prayerful shadow of that tree, instead of in the dry atmosphere of a prayerless study, or under the poisonous shadow of the upas tree of modern religion. What different manner of men should we then be in our houses, in our offices and shops, and in our assemblies! Like Philip and Nathanael, only in a far higher sense, should we then enjoy, in the cool shade of the "apple-tree," His fragrance and His sweet fruits, and our communion one with another as well as our individual testimony would have more of the sweet fragrance of Christ.

4. The Sycamore, or Mulberry-Fig Tree. That tree, with the little man in its top, so eagerly looking out for the Saviour, appears to be a beautiful figure of the gospel and of the blessing connected with it, and promised to every sinner looking for salvation. At sunrise the birds flutter from the lower branches to the tops of the trees, to greet the glorious orb and offer their songs of praise to the Creator. So did Zacchaeus. He was but a small bird, an insignificant wren. His elevation indeed

was no self-exaltation, but rather self-abasement, when he, unmindful of his official rank and dignity, like a school-boy climbed the sycamore tree, intent upon catching a glimpse of the Saviour, Who came to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord. He was eager to catch sight of Him Who had said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Zacchaeus also sought and found; nay, he found even more than he sought. For not only did his eyes see the salvation which God had prepared before the face of all people, but the Saviour, Whose joy it is to honour those who abase themselves, invited Himself as guest with Zacchaeus, and he heard the Saviour's own voice say to him, "This day is salvation come to this house . . . For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."

Blessed mulberry fig-tree, with the fruit of a sinner looking for a Saviour! May our Lord and Saviour, Whose eyes, so graciously quick, at once discovered that hidden fruit and made it drop into His lap as a fruit of His labour, grant unto us wise and gracious eyes for a timely discovery of such fruits half hidden, as it were, between the branches of His gospel tree, without attempting to shake them off before they are ripe. God, Who alone gives the increase, will at the time of harvest make the ripe fruits drop into the laps of His servants, to render all the praise to Him from Whom all blessings flow, and to Whom all power belongs, even to "God and the Lamb," once for sinners slain. For He Who called Zacchaeus and us has sent us into the world, as the Father had sent Him into it, to be witnesses of divine grace and truth. May He grant us the joy of reaping more fruits of our feeble labour from that blessed gospel tree, and to pray under its shadow to God for His rich blessing on all His labourers in the gospel. We shall then be kept from two extremes — either of growing cold in our interest in the work of the gospel for the church's sake, as is the case, alas! with not a few; or, what is just as bad, if not worse still, of making everything of the gospel, and neglect the church and the "assembling of ourselves together," the sad habit of so many now-a-days. The saints at Philippi were equally familiar with the "fig-tree" and with the "mulberry-fig tree" or "sycamore." And why? Because they were seated under the shade of the "apple-tree," preferring its fragrance and sweet fruits to all other trees, "always rejoicing in the Lord." Let us follow their example.

We now return to our prophet under the gourd.

Chapter 10. 1889 356.

What Jonah Learnt Under the Gourd.

Conclusion.

Jonah now had to learn by the withering of his own heart in its disappointment what the tender pity and mercy of God's heart is. He had not known how to enter upon that tender divine mercy, and therefore had to learn his own need of it through personal suffering. This he learnt under the miraculous tree.

"But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement [or, silent] east wind, and the sun burnt upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live." His heart withered within, like the tree before him,

and rose in bitterness against God, Who again said to Jonah, "Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd?" The prophet's language now assumes the character of defiance: he replies, "I do well to be angry, even unto death."

What a contrast to this was his language when at the bottom of the sea in the fish's belly! There his conscience had to say to him, and he cried to God in his distress. But at the withering of the gourd it was different. His conscience was silent in that case, but not his natural heart, which rose in rebellion against God. Had not the gourd been a gift of God, unasked for by Jonah? And no sooner did he begin to enjoy its shade, cooling the prophet's heated face, than God took it away; for Jonah no doubt perceived that the withering away of the miraculous tree as well as its sudden growth was the work of God. Did it not seem cruel? Did it not appear like mockery at the prophet's disappointment? Was this the reward for his fearless and faithful testimony in that great and wicked city? So the tempter would whisper to Jonah, and the natural and rebellions heart was but too inclined to listen to the evil suggestions of the old serpent. But ought not the very rustling of the leaves of that tree, which had covered and cooled the prophet's head and body with their beneficial shadow, have spoken as God's "still small voice" to the irate prophet, "Jonah, what doest thou here on this sad place of observation? Art thou waiting for God's judgment, Who is 'waiting to be gracious?' Art thou angry, because He is good?" But the prophet did not understand as yet that voice of grace. He persevered in his graceless attitude. The tree had therefore to be stripped of its soothing ornament, so that none but the bare branches and stem might remain, and the prophet, deprived of its beneficial shadow, might learn by his own suffering his need of that sympathy which he lacked so much and had little known how to appreciate.

Even to the most excellent of God's saints this exercise of conscience and heart cannot be spared. Abraham's heart, as another has observed, certainly was grieved at the loss of Ishmael, but his conscience in that case had to say to him. It was very different when Isaac had to be sacrificed. There Abraham's conscience did not speak, but his heart all the more. God was trying his heart, whether it rested more in the gift than in the Giver. Abraham stood the test. Jacob had to endure years of trials during his service with Laban; but his conscience could but remind him that his sufferings were deserved, and that he was only reaping what he had sown. His grief at the loss of Joseph was quite another thing, for in that case his heart had far more to say than his conscience. The same difference we find in David, when amidst the ruins of Ziklag, and when leaving Jerusalem in his flight before Absalom. Never had David sunk so low as at that moment, when he offered his and his men's co-operation to the king of the Philistines, the inveterate enemies of God and His people, to fight against the people of God, David's own people. Terrible as was his sin against Uriah at a later period (for which God visited him through the rebellion of his son Absalom), yet David's moral degradation, even in that terrible case, was not so deep as it was at Aphek before the battle of Gilboa. What a difference between the shepherd boy David in his single-handed combat of faith with the mighty giant Goliath, and the chieftain David, offering his assistance to the same enemy against the people of God! It was the moment of his deepest moral degradation during his whole life. God in mercy frustrated David's wicked offer, urgently repeated notwithstanding the refusal on the part of the lords of the Philistines. But it was followed immediately by the just punishment of God. On their return David and his men found their homesteads burnt down and their wives and children had been carried away by the Amalekites. The smoking ruins of that city, which David had suffered himself to be presented with for a

residence among the enemies of God and His people, in his unbelief and unfaithfulness, which is the child of unbelief, spoke loudly to David's conscience in his desperate position, when his own companions were ready to stone him. "But David encouraged himself in Jehovah his God." Doubtless he must have been on his face in the dust before the Lord previously, Or he could not have "encouraged himself in the Lord." God gave back to him and to his companions all they had lost. David had encouraged and strengthened himself in the Lord his God. His deep exercise of heart and conscience was in that case but the forerunner of a bolder, more thorough, and devoted service than before.

Very different to his distress at Ziklag were the exercises of David's soul when fleeing from Jerusalem, his royal residence, and home of all that was dear to David's heart. Then, when fleeing from his rebellious son, he had to leave behind everything that was dear and precious to him. Jerusalem was a place very different to Ziklag. It was God's greatest gift to him; Jehovah's reward for all the persecutions, hardships, and contests which he had had to encounter. Jerusalem had been the goal of David's desires — godly desires.* And now he had to give up all this on account of the deadly hostility and rebellion of his son Absalom. The tenderest and closest ties having been rent, there remained to the deeply abased king nothing but the favour and mercy of his God, whilst David's conscience even then did not fail to assert itself. Nathan the prophet had indeed announced the divine pardon to the king after his penitent confession, but he had added that the sword should not depart from his house, "for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." The grace of God, pardoning the penitent sinner, that he die not (James 5:19-20; 1 John 5:16-17), and which restores him to communion with God, must not be confounded with the righteous government of God, which often makes a fallen but restored child of God during the whole of his after life feel and realise the solemn consequences of sin, not merely in the sense of God's justice, but of His wisdom and grace, in order thus to keep present to the memory of our hearts and consciences the solemn character of sin, often so pregnant with continuous sorrow in its consequences — not in our communion with Himself, but for our practical humiliation and as a constant warning. For He knows how apt we are practically to forget the seriousness of sin, when its serious consequences have passed away.

[* The Psalms of David testify to the truth of this. Psalms 51:1-19, which expresses his deep exercise of conscience, contains also at the close the expression of his heart's affection for the beloved city and his prayer for her welfare.]

Thus we recognise again God's hand in David's flight from Jerusalem, and in the events afterwards. All these spoke, of course, with a loud voice to David's conscience. But, as has been observed already, David's heart was even more than his conscience moved and exercised by these events, from the reasons mentioned above. And when the king passed over the brook Kidron, and "all the country wept with a loud voice," and "the king went up by the ascent of Mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and went barefoot, and all the people that were with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went;" and Jerusalem, the beloved city, with everything dear to the heart of the fleeing king, disappeared behind the temporary cloud, his spiritual horizon was thronging with thoughts of God and His mercy, which endureth for ever. But let us return to our prophet under the miraculous tree. It was God's intention that the heart as well as the conscience of His prophet (as of all His servants) should be exercised. There are believers whose consciences have been truly exercised, but from

want of exercise of heart, they know but little of the sympathy of Christ. Jonah understood as yet very little of God's tender mercy. He had therefore through suffering to learn his own need of it.

"Then said the Lord, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night; and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than six score thousand persons which cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle?" In other words, "You, Jonah, pity this gourd, which came up in one night and perished in one night, and which thou hast neither planted nor hast made it grow. You mourn over its shortened existence, because it gave you shade and coolness. You regret its sudden decay, because it deprived you of the relief and refreshment which that tree had provided for you. And should not God have pity on a city like Nineveh, where there are one hundred and twenty thousand babes [God knew their number] that cannot discern their left hand from their right, besides those millions of penitent inhabitants, creatures of Mine, and your fellow-sinners, Jonah, and so much cattle?" God, Who hears the voice of the raven, and without Whom not a sparrow falls from the roof, had heard even the moaning and lowing of the cattle — His creatures-ascending to heaven together with the cries of lamentation of numberless penitent sinners. The prophet had witnessed that grand deeply-affecting scene of general penitence, which had not failed to reach the ear and heart of the gracious God and Creator, Who with His numberless hosts of mighty angels rejoices "over one sinner that repenteth." But those sounds of mourning had only fallen on Jonah's ears. They had not reached his heart. He was only thinking of the divine pardon which would be called forth by their penitence, and impair his reputation and character as a prophet. But now God had reached Jonah's heart. Once He had spoken to His servant Job in a whirlwind, when Job's self-righteousness was to receive the final blow, after God had spoken by a mediator's voice and silenced him, who had silenced his friends. God had spoken to His servant Elijah first by the mighty "wind" and the "earthquake" and the "fire," and then with the "still small voice." And now He has reached also the heart of His servant Jonah. In the storm He had spoken to his conscience; but now the "still small voice" of His grace has appealed to the heart of His prophet, and not in vain.

I do not remember any passage in the whole range of the Old Testament, where the perfect patience and goodness of God, and His marvellous longsuffering and grace appear so prominent and express themselves in such a touching way, as in our chapter, recording Jehovah's way of proceeding with His grumbling and discontented prophet! What language the servant had dared to employ against his Master, the poor worm against his Maker? And what is Jehovah's answer? The Master condescends to give account, so to speak, to His servant about His gracious dealing with penitent Nineveh, in words which man's pride would have deemed unbecoming for a great and mighty Lord and Master. But you and I, christian reader, know that nothing could possibly be worthier of such a God than the way and manner in which He dealt with His feeble servant and the words He spoke to him. The Lord had made him feel His mighty hand. In the storm and in the belly of the fish He had spoken to His conscience and broken his will. But now Jonah's heart was to be broken and to be melted under the sense of God's grace, love, goodness, mercy and longsuffering. And what words could be more adapted for that purpose than those addressed by Jehovah to His prophet? On the dark Sinaitic background of the Old Testament they stand out all the more distinctly and wonderfully in shining letters. The voice which once amidst the thunder and lightening of Sinai, from the dark cloud and with the voice of the trumpet, had forbidden the

trembling people under pain of death even to touch the mountain, at the summit of which the majesty of God appeared, speaks here to the servant, murmuring at God's grace, "And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city?" The same, Who from the mount of terror, where even Moses, His faithful servant, stood trembling and shaking, had spoken, "And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart," we hear saying here to the grumbling prophet, "And so much cattle?" Well might Jonah have exclaimed, "What patience, O my God, is thine, With all the grievous sins of mine!

It is beyond expression. Where is there a God, so ready to spare, And where a Master, so kind to forbear, In spite of such transgression!" But God's gracious intention with Jonah had now produced its desired effect. The book closes with God's question to His prophet left unanswered. Jonah's heart has been reached and melted under the overwhelming sense of divine mercy and grace. Like Job, he lays his hand upon his mouth, and his silent confession seems to say with Job, "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further." The simple fact, that the prophet himself wrote this book, thus recording his own sin and shame, proves how thoroughly not only his will but also his heart had been broken, softened and humbled under the sense of the grace of such a God. For true as it is, that the account written by him was indited by the Holy Ghost, this in no way impairs the beautiful significance of that fact; for we may rest assured that the Spirit of God, Who might have chosen any other servant of God for penning that account, would not have employed the prophet Jonah for writing this portion of Holy Writ, so full of instruction within so small a compass, had not the prophet been in that condition of soul, which God in His own school had intended to produce in His servant. May we too receive the instruction which God intends for us also, for the things that happened to Jonah, the prophet, "are written for our admonition."

J. A. von Poseck. (From the German of "Worte der Wahrheit in Liebe.")

S. One thing I do

"One thing I do."

J. A. von Poseck.

1888 60 [The following remarks are the conclusion of an article in the "Christian Testimony," entitled "Three Requisites for these last days," which was interrupted by the much regretted close of that periodical. The complete article afterwards appeared in the German periodical, "Words of Truth in Love," from which it has been translated for the former readers of the "Christian Testimony."]

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing [I do]; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Thus, a man could speak, who was subject to like passions as we are. And not only so; — he was "the chief of sinners," which in his case was not a mere, expression of false humility, but the simple truth, for he had been a blasphemer and injurious, persecuting the church of God. Like his namesake of old, he also had been "granted by request,"* but in a very different sense! The former had been given by Jehovah "in His wrath" to be king over His people, at their obstinate request, because they preferred a government after the manner of the nations to Jehovah's government. But the "Saul" of the New Testament was the fruit of the prayer of the first christian martyr — "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge" — to whose death Saul had consented, and been an active witness of it. The Saul of the Old Testament had been David's persecutor; the Saul of the New Testament had persecuted David's Son and Lord. The former was "little in his own eyes," when he was anointed king of Israel. But he did not continue in that godly condition of soul, but became high-minded, self-willed and disobedient to God, and hence lost his throne and life. The Saul of the N. Testament, regarded as a prince among his people, was great before men at the beginning of his career. But the great "Saul" was changed into "Paul," 1:e. "small" ("Paulus"). He became "little in his own eyes, but like Christ's humble forerunner, "great before the Lord."

[*"Saul" means "asked for," or, "granted by entreaty."] And what more helpful, beloved, to render us "little in our own eyes," than keeping them, in the power of the ungrieved Spirit of glory, fixed on Christ, our Head in glory? Paul had been "apprehended" by the Lord of glory, and thus he "followed after," that he might "apprehend that for which he had been apprehended of Christ."

One constantly meets with the expression of "Saul's conversion." Now the meaning of "conversion" is the being turned right about face, so that the face is where the back had been, as in the case of the Thessalonians. Although this was, of course, true of Saul in a Jewish sense, yet the Lord's dealing with him on his way to Damascus had the especial character, that he was "apprehended" by Christ. When on his way to Damascus, persecuting the church of God, Saul had reached the highest round of the ladder of Jewish perfection. He was in the zenith of his religious fame and influence, carrying with him the letters of the high priest for persecuting the Christians at

Damascus. Then and there it was, that a light brighter than the sun at noon, came down from the rejected and glorified Christ, and shone all around, and laid the persecutor flat on his face in the dust. It was a personal question between the glorified Christ and Saul. Thus the person of Jesus is prominent throughout this chapter (Acts 9:1-43 :), as in the preceding chapter it is the person of the Holy Ghost. The greater the halo of Saul's religious renown and attainments had been, the deeper was his fall and the more complete the crash and smash of everything in which he had trusted and gloried. But whilst the overpowering light from the glorified Christ laid Saul low in the dust, it required a still greater power to turn a Saul into a Paul. It was the Divine power of those words addressed by the glorified Head of the church to its persecutor, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" Those few words shook his soul to its inmost depths; and not his soul only, but also the religious scaffolding on which he had been building and in which he had trusted. What a terrible discovery those few words from the glorified One there above did effect on the smitten down one here below! Why, to be a zealous devoted Israelite was to be at open war with Jehovah, Whom he thought he was serving. A fearful discovery indeed! Not one single moral element of his soul could stand against its all-powerful and overwhelming effect. His soul alike with his body lay prostrate in the dust. But this was not all. Those whom Saul persecuted were so entirely identified with that glorified One, Whom he had now to own as "Lord," that to persecute them was the same as to persecute Him — the Head of that wondrous body called out from glory, when its members were assailed on earth. Marvellous mystery, all powerful in its revelation! But to the zealous Jew a still more crushing discovery was impending, which "pricked and cut his heart," if possible, more deeply still than were the hearts of his co-religionists at Pentecost, in whose persecution he was engaged. At the trembling enquiry of the prostrate persecutor, "Who art Thou, Lord?" the reply comes from glory, "I am Jesus, the Nazarean, Whom thou persecutest." The "Nazarean," Whose very name was sufficient to elicit from a Jew words and gestures of deepest hatred, was the Lord of glory, David's Son and Lord at the right hand of God! — that name, which Saul had thought it his duty to oppose with all his energy, and which, if possible, he fain would have blotted out from the earth. Jesus, the Nazarean, "rejected by the builders," was the Prophet and Messiah Whom Moses and the prophets had announced — the same Jehovah, Whom Saul had thought to serve by his persecution. More powerful than the light from glory, which had blinded his natural eyes, was the light from the glorified One, disclosing the truth to his inward eye. That truth, terrible as it was for the moment to Saul, proved to be of immeasurably blessed consequences to himself and to the church of God, which he had persecuted. That discovery was the "coup de grace" for the Judaism in Saul. God, Who now commanded the light to shine out of darkness, had shined in Saul's heart to give the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. But a continuous three days' blindness with fasting was required for Saul, for the deepening and maturing of God's work in him and to enlighten the eyes of his mind. Then, after the scales, as it were, had fallen from his eyes inwardly and outwardly, and he had been baptised by Ananias and been filled with the Holy Ghost, there proceeded from the house of Judas in the "straight" street a new man — "Paul" instead of "Saul;" instead of the merciless persecutor of Christ and His Christians, the fearless preacher of His name and grace and glory, "preaching straightway Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God," and also "the very Christ." He was a witness of faith, who, as he once had assisted in shedding the blood of Christians, from henceforth devoted his whole life to their service, ready to be "poured out as a libation on the sacrifice and ministration of their faith," till at last he also, like Stephen, the martyr and witness of Christ's glory, sealed with

his own blood the testimony of his christian career, so blessed and fruitful for his time and the ages to come.

What Characterised Paul, The Apostle.

1888 74 As has been observed already, that which in such an especial way characterised the apostle, was his being "apprehended of Christ." As an historical fact it was done on his way to Damascus, but it served to imprint upon his whole being and character that particular stamp which distinguishes him from other servants of the Lord. Christ, the glorified Head of the church, His body, at the right hand of God is the glorious subject of his testimony as well as of his individual walk. The apostle's heart and mind were directed towards one point only — Jesus, the once persecuted and rejected Nazarean there above. Not only Paul's outward man, but his whole inner, yea, his inmost man, heart, mind and spirit, had been "apprehended" or laid hold of, by the glorified Christ. As the plant turns towards the sun, so all the powers and inclinations of the new man and of the resurrection life of Christ in the apostle turned towards the glorified Son of man, in the energy of the Spirit of glory that rested upon him and filled him. As the magnet needle, though trembling through the motions of the vessel, invariably turns towards the pole, so the heart of the apostle of the church turned to its glorified Head. That unique goal, surpassingly beautiful and all glorious for which he had been "apprehended," he sought to apprehend although he had not yet apprehended it. What formerly he had been, when Saul, — a zealous upright Israelite, pursuing a certain aim with his whole heart and with unabating zeal, serving God from his forefathers with a pure conscience, he was now in a better and infinitely higher sense as the servant of Christ and apostle of the church. In the third chapter of his Epistle to his beloved Philippians, that goal which he pursued, is most distinctly put before us.

What had appeared to be a gain to Saul, the zealous Israelite, was counted by Paul not only nothing, but positive loss. All those religious privileges, connected with the dispensation of the law of Moses, granted by God to His earthly people, invested as they were with the halo of the grand historical recollections of more than fifteen centuries, were now for Paul nothing but "flesh" — religious respectable flesh in the splendid, gorgeous, apparel of the religious ceremonies of Judaism, but after all nothing but "flesh." What formerly had appeared to him as "gain" the apostle of glory counted but "loss" "for Christ," the glorified "Jesus," Who had appeared to him on his way to Damascus. Neither was that depreciation of all his former religious privileges and attainments with Paul a mere transitory sentiment in the first zeal of conversion. He continued to count all these things "loss" (Php 3:8), the more he knew the now glorious, all gracious, all beautiful Person of Him Whose name had once filled him with hatred. Mark the longer period in ver. 8. In ver. 7 he counted it all "loss" "for Christ." But in ver. 8 he continues "Yea, doubtless and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." — When a strong wind arises, high and long billows arise in the sea; a gentle breeze only produces low and short wavelets. It is the same with spiritual motions. When our mind is engaged with a beautiful and interesting object, or the heart moved by a mighty and elevating idea, we express ourselves in longer periods than in speaking or writing of ordinary things. We find this for instance in the first chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, where the apostle, moved by the Spirit of God, pours out to the saints in Ephesus and to the faithful in Christ Jesus his heart, filled with the thoughts of God's wondrous counsels and blessings in Christ Jesus. The whole of the chapter (excepting the usual apostolic benediction in ver. 1 & 2), consists of only two periods. The first of them (ver. 3-14)

contains no less than 12 verses, and the second (ver. 15-23) nine verses. But the apostle does not content himself with saying that he continues to count as loss all things that were formerly gain to him, but he adds, "For Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ." The polished and learned man, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, cannot find words strong enough to express his thorough abandonment of Judaism and of all its boasted privileges. The more he perceived the excellency and perfection of Jesus Christ, beholding with unveiled face the glory of the Lord, the more everything that had been formerly such a gain to him in the eyes of his co-religionists, appeared to him in the light of that glory not only "loss," but "dung," that he might "win Christ, and be found in Him" — and "know Him." This reminds me of a dear saint, who followed the apostle, as he had followed his heavenly pattern, who during her earthly career "always set the Lord" before her. The christian lady referred to, possessed a marvellous memory and was so familiar with her bible, that she was able at once to point out any passage in the Scriptures referred to, often not only the chapter, but chapter and verse. And the word of God was not merely stored up in the memory of the head, but she had taken care to treasure it up in the memory of her heart, like the Lord's blessed mother, for she was a true Mary, the Lord's devoted handmaid. But the constant admiration by unwise friends, of her wonderful memory had perhaps impaired in her that all-important quality of real christian humility: or was it that it pleased God to give to her, like to His apostle of old, a "thorn in the flesh," to prevent spiritual pride? However this may be, she was laid on a bed of sickness for many years, which at last impaired her memory to such a degree that the hitherto well known passages of Scripture — chapters and verses — began to be erased from the tablets of her memory. But this infirmity could neither reach nor diminish the "good treasure of her heart." This very Epistle of Paul to the Philippians had been one of her favorite portions in the New Testament. So that now, the memory of the heart lasting longer than that of the head, and supporting the weakness of the latter, this epistle remained longest in her memory. But gradually even this portion began to vanish away, 1:e. the words though not the contents; and she retained only these words, "that I may win Christ" — "and be found in Him" — "that I may know Him." At last, having lost nearly all her memory, there remained on its empty tablet — its "tabula rasa," only one single word engraved, the word — "HIM." — "That's enough," she said, "I have Him," and nobody can take Him away from me, nor me from Him."

"He," Christ — was the sum of all her scriptural knowledge. All those Bible passages, formerly stored in the upper chamber of her memory, were now in the good treasure of the chamber of her heart, condensed in that one word, "Him" — "Christ." Is not this the right way of reading our Bibles, christian reader? On the last page of holy writ, we find as the sum of the whole word of God, these two words, "I Jesus." The Spirit and the Bride answer, "Come." And at the close the Lord says, "Yea, I come quickly." Can we, with His disciple, add in truth, "Amen, come, Lord Jesus"? We know that the Spirit and the Bride, His true church, as such, ever say, "Come" (ver. 17). But in ver. 20, it is John, as an individual believer, who says, "Amen, come Lord Jesus!" Can we add, in truth, our "Amen" to his? Only in the measure as Christ's ever blessed Person is our object, and we "rejoice in the Lord always," keeping our consciences sweet in His holy, yet, gracious presence, shall we be able to do so. Only in His presence can the hope of His coming again, have the power and comfort of a truly realised hope. The words, "I Jesus," and, "Yea, I come quickly," are in close connection. Is it not the same in common life? Suppose, some one has gone into a far country, to prepare for his wife and family a better home. Every month brings them letters, each line breathing

truest kindness and interest in the welfare of his own he has left behind, and proving that time and distance have not diminished his love and care for his own, and that he is ever the same loving and tenderly careful husband and father. Suddenly a telegram arrives with the news, "I come tomorrow to fetch you!" What an outburst of jubilant rapture will those few words, "I come tomorrow," call forth from his own! They know what he is for them; therefore they feel what it means, when he says, "I come! " And how comes it, beloved, that the hope of our Lord's coming again, which we may expect every day, nay, every moment, has so little effect upon our hearts, our consciences, and our walk? How is it, that this precious portion of christian truth, which formerly used to occupy the chief place in any meetings for christian edification, so often recedes into the far background, so that for weeks, nay, even for months, scarcely any reference even is made to it? It used not to be so. What has caused this sad change which has come upon us? Is it not this, that the eyes of our minds, and, in consequence, our hearts and thoughts, have turned away from the glorified One at the right hand of God, and from His all-glorious, all-gracious, all-beauteous, and altogether lovely Person, and so been turned away to earthly things? We have ceased to realise what He is, "Jesus Christ, yesterday, today, and for ever, the same." Thus the hope of His coming again has lost its cheering, refreshing, comforting power as to the walk of so many believers, reducing them practically or doctrinally to the level of the world or of the religious "camp." It was not so with the apostle of the church of glory, nor with his beloved Philippians, whom he called "his joy and his crown."

1888 103 What a power of attraction lies in a beautiful and desirable goal! It sets into motion all the spiritual and bodily capacities. The more glorious the goal, the greater the effort to reach it. Day by day this may be perceived in the pursuits of this world, so vain and yet so eagerly and perseveringly carried on, it may be at a race or regatta, where every muscle, nerve, and sinew is being strained to the utmost to reach the desired goal; or in the arena of political ambition, or military fame, or other vanities of this world, where, in the pursuit of the fervently coveted goal, other attractive objects lose their charm, the competitors being wholly absorbed with the goal of attraction before them, which does not permit of side looks. The nearer to the goal, the greater the efforts, perseverance, and undivided attention of the one who runs in the race. Many otherwise attractive objects by the wayside are scarcely perceived, and soon left behind in the distance.

Judaism with its privileges, ceremonies, and self-efforts, so attractive and desirable to the religious natural man, remained like a distant coast far behind Paul, making for the shore of resurrection, and for Him Who stood on that shore, not only a risen Saviour, as He appeared to His fishing disciples on this earthly shore (John 21:1-25 :) — to show them, that He, though risen, with the same love as when He was daily walking with them on earth, continued to care for their earthly necessities — but as the ascended and glorified head of the church, as He appeared to Stephen, His martyr, and to Paul, Stephen's persecutor, on his way to Damascus. All those splendid religious privileges had paled and faded away before Paul's glorious goal of attraction. When the sun rises, not only the darkness disappears but also the stars.

All those things that had appeared desirable to Paul, the Jew, lay now behind him like a distant coast; nay, he had entirely lost sight of them, though not of his former co-religionists. To him not only did all these things appear to be nothing but dung; but, more so, he had forgotten them altogether. Sometimes we hear a christian with great animation "recounting" what he has "given up" for Christ and for christian truth. He thereby only shows how much he values that which he

professes to have given up for Christ, and how little he has realised what Christ has given up for him, and not only given up, but also given, for He "gave Himself for us." He further proves how far he is from having understood the meaning of our apostle when he wrote to the same Philippians: "For unto you it is given, on behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him, but also to suffer for His sake." Such looking back towards the religious "camp," from which one professes to have gone forth "unto Him" (Hebrews 13:13), further shows that one has not yet arrived at that happy forgetfulness of those Old Testament witnesses of faith in the eleventh chapter of the same Epistle to the Hebrews, who were not even "mindful of that country from whence they came out" (ver. 15). When all those things, which once appeared a precious "gain" to Saul, had become to Paul nought but "loss" and "dung" for Christ's sake, he did not think that he had "given up" something for Christ's sake. One does not give up dung, one throws it away, if one sees it really to be such. A "gain" I might give up, but a "loss" I do not give up, but avoid it. And as those blessed forefathers of the apostle had forgotten that country from whence they came out, so Paul forgot the "camp," with its contents so dear and precious, and its recollections so sacred to the heart of a Jew. To him all this had become not only "flesh," "loss," and even "dung," but he continues, "One thing I do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

If any one might speak of having "given up" something for Christ, Paul was the man. But to him all this was now only "that which is behind." What is behind is soon forgotten, especially if it is nothing but dung. So Paul, the apostle, had forgotten all that which to the zealous Jew, Saul, had been the most precious privileges and glorious attainments. Was it because these privileges and blessings given by God to His earthly people were esteemed lightly by him? Or had his heart, since he had been "apprehended by Christ," been alienated from his former co-religionists through the bitter persecution he had suffered from them? Such a spirit was far from him. Let his own words speak. "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish to be accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the services, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, Who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Romans 9:1-5).

These words show that Paul, the apostle, did not esteem lightly the privileges which God had given to Israel. And so great was his love to his "brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh," that like Moses (who wished to be blotted out of the book of God, if He would not pardon Israel's sin), Paul also had wished, for his people's sake, to be banished from Christ with a curse. And this after all the bitter persecution and abuse he had to experience at their hands! But as the sun with renewed and fresh splendour breaks through the dark clouds and scatters them, so at the close of that memorable passage, in even heightened splendour shines forth the priceless value and glory of Christ, "Who is over all, God blessed for ever." Amen.

All these splendid privileges of Judaism disappeared before Christ, the glorified Head of the church, as the fog before the sun. To the Hebrews the apostle wrote, "Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away;" and to the Corinthians, "Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, there is a new creation: old things have

passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Apprehended by Christ, he sought to apprehend the glorious prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, forgetting those things which to him were "behind," and reaching forth unto those things which were before him, his eyes steadily looking towards the goal, and thus "pressing toward the mark." And let us heed what follows: — "Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded; and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you." And, "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." "For our conversation [or citizenship] is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall change our body of humiliation, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working, whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself."

Christian reader, is your "horn filled with oil?" (1 Samuel 16:1.) Are we "filled with the Spirit" Who glorifieth Christ, receiveth from His, and showeth it unto us? if so, we shall be able to discern a false Christ from a true one; and our hearts, like Mary's pure and white alabaster box, will be filled with the precious "ointment of pure nard, very costly," that is with adoring thoughts of Him Who is "altogether lovely, and the chief among ten thousands" — thoughts of adoration and thanksgiving to God, from Whom all blessings flow, and to His dear Son, in Whom all blessings are. And our eye, fixed by the power of the Holy Ghost on the glorified Christ, will make "the whole body light," and thus enable us, steadily looking toward the goal before us, after the example of the apostle of the church and of glory, to "press on toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus," until He, Who is "our hope," and our "bright morning star," shall come to take us up to Himself into the Father's house, whither He has gone before to prepare a place for us. Blessed be His glorious name, now and evermore. Amen. J. A. von Poseck.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
 - 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net