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Our Daily Homily

F. B. Meyer



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Author(s): Meyer, F.B. (1847-1929)

Publisher: Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library

Description: In writing this work, F.B. Meyer chose one verse from each chapter of the Bible and meditated upon it. The result was a five-volume set of devotional essays in the style of biblical commentary. Should one read one of Meyer's meditations per day, one would have new devotion material every day for over three years, as there are 1,189 chapters total in the Old and New Testaments. The meditations themselves reflect their author's deep respect for God, Scripture, and his readers as fellow Christians. In the preface to his fifth volume, the British Baptist preacher wrote: "None of my books is dearer to me than this, or seems to contain more of my innermost thought; but at best it is only a handful of meal in the barrel, which may God multiply till He send rain on the earth."

Kathleen O'Bannon

CCEL Staff

Subjects: The Bible
Works about the Bible

Contents

Title Page	1
Homily 1. 1 Sam. i. 15.	2
Homily 2. 1 Sam. ii. 19.	3
Homily 3. 1 Sam. iii. 10.	4
Homily 4. 1 Sam. iv. 3.	5
Homily 5. 1 Sam. v. 3.	6
Homily 6. 1 Sam. vi. 12.	7
Homily 7. 1 Sam. vii. 8.	8
Homily 8. 1 Sam. viii. 6.	9
Homily 9. 1 Sam. ix. 6.	10
Homily 10. 1 Sam. x. 7.	11
Homily 11. 1 Sam. xi. 14.	12
Homily 12. 1 Sam. xii. 22.	13
Homily 13. 1 Sam. xiii. 12.	14
Homily 14. 1 Sam. xiv. 27.	15
Homily 15. 1 Sam. xv. 22.	16
Homily 16. 1 Sam. xvi. 13.	17
Homily 17. 1 Sam. xvii. 26.	18
Homily 18. 1 Sam. xviii. 5, 14, 15, 30.	19
Homily 19. 1 Sam. xix. 6.	20
Homily 20. 1 Sam. xx. 18.	21
Homily 21. 1 Sam. xxi. 9.	22
Homily 22. 1 Sam. xxii. 3.	23
Homily 23. 1 Sam. xxiii. 9.	24
Homily 24. 1 Sam. xxiv. 5.	25
Homily 25. 1 Sam. xxv. 31.	26

Homily 26. 1 Sam. xxvi. 21.	27
Homily 27. 1 Sam. xxvii. 1.	28
Homily 28. 1 Sam. xxviii. 18.	29
Homily 29. 1 Sam. xxix. 3.	30
Homily 30. 1 Sam. xxx. 6.	31
Homily 31. 1 Sam. xxxi. 11, 12.	32
Homily 32. 2 Sam. i. 23.	33
Homily 33. 2 Sam. ii. 4.	34
Homily 34. 2 Sam. iii. 1.	35
Homily 35. 2 Sam. iv. 9.	36
Homily 36. 2 Sam. v. 13.	37
Homily 37. 2 Sam. vi. 3.	38
Homily 38. 2 Sam. vii. 25.	39
Homily 39. 2 Sam. viii. 11.	40
Homily 40. 2 Sam. ix. 7.	41
Homily 41. 2 Sam. x. 12.	42
Homily 42. 2 Sam. xi. 1.	43
Homily 43. 2 Sam. xii. 29.	44
Homily 44. 2 Sam. xiii. 31.	45
Homily 45. 2 Sam. xiv. 14.	46
Homily 46. 2 Sam. xv. 26.	47
Homily 47. 2 Sam. xvi. 14.	48
Homily 48. 2 Sam. xvii. 21.	49
Homily 49. 2 Sam. xviii. 22, 23.	50
Homily 50. 2 Sam. xix. 42.	51
Homily 51. 2 Sam. xx. 2.	52
Homily 52. 2 Sam. xxi. 1.	53
Homily 53. 2 Sam. xxii. 36.	54
Homily 54. 2 Sam. xxiii. 4.	55
Homily 55. 2 Sam. xxiv. 24.	56
Homily 56. 1 Kings i. 29.	57
Homily 57. 1 Kings ii. 4.	58

Homily 58. 1 Kings iii. 13.	59
Homily 59. 1 Kings iv. 29.	60
Homily 60. 1 Kings v. 4.	61
Homily 61. 1 Kings vi. 7.	62
Homily 62. 1 Kings vii. 46.	63
Homily 63. 1 Kings viii. 59	64
Homily 64. 1 Kings ix. 3.	65
Homily 65. 1 Kings x. 9.	66
Homily 66. 1 Kings xi. 4.	67
Homily 67. 1 Kings xii. 33.	68
Homily 68. 1 Kings xiii. 21, 22	69
Homily 69. 1 Kings xiv. 5.	70
Homily 70. 1 Kings xv. 11.	71
Homily 71. 1 Kings xvi. 33.	72
Homily 72. 1 Kings xvii. 4, 9.	73
Homily 73. 1 Kings xviii. 42.	74
Homily 74. 1 Kings xix. 5.	75
Homily 75. 1 Kings xx. 40.	76
Homily 76. 1 Kings xxi. 20.	77
Homily 77. 1 Kings xxii. 34.	78
Homily 78. 2 Kings i. 9, 11, 13.	79
Homily 79. 2 Kings ii. 2, 4, 6.	80
Homily 80. 2 Kings iii. 17.	81
Homily 81. 2 Kings iv. 6.	82
Homily 82. 2 Kings v. 14.	83
Homily 83. 2 Kings vi. 17.	84
Homily 84. 2 Kings vii. 9.	85
Homily 85. 2 Kings viii. 11.	86
Homily 86. 2 Kings ix. 22.	87
Homily 87. 2 Kings x. 31.	88
Homily 88. 2 Kings xi. 12.	89
Homily 89. 2 Kings xii. 4.	90

Homily 90. 2 Kings xiii. 18.	91
Homily 91. 2 Kings xiv. 6.	92
Homily 92. 2 Kings xv. 9, 18, 24, 28.	93
Homily 93. 2 Kings xvi. 10.	94
Homily 94. 2 Kings xvii. 41.	95
Homily 95. 2 Kings xviii. 20.	96
Homily 96. 2 Kings xix. 14.	97
Homily 97. 2 Kings xx. 10.	98
Homily 98. 2 Kings xxi. 1.	99
Homily 99. 2 Kings xxii. 20.	100
Homily 100. 2 Kings xxiii. 25.	101
Homily 101. 2 Kings xxiv. 13.	102
Homily 102. 2 Kings xxv. 30	103
Homily 103. 1 Chron. i. 1.	104
Homily 104. 1 Chron. ii. 1.	105
Homily 105. 1 Chron. iii. 1.	106
Homily 106. 1 Chron. iv. 9.	107
Homily 107. 1 Chron. v. 20.	108
Homily 108. 1 Chron. vi. 33.	109
Homily 109. 1 Chron. vii. 23.	110
Homily 110. 1 Chron. viii. 33, 34.	111
Homily 111. 1 Chron. ix. 22, 29, 31, 33.	112
Homily 112. 1 Chron. x. 13	113
Homily 113. 1 Chron. xi. 17.	114
Homily 114. 1 Chron. xii. 38.	115
Homily 115. 1 Chron. xiii. 12.	116
Homily 116. 1 Chron. xiv. 15.	117
Homily 117. 1 Chron. xv. 22.	118
Homily 118. 1 Chron. xvi. 9.	119
Homily 119. 1 Chron. xvii. 23, 24.	120
Homily 120. 1 Chron. xviii. 73.	121
Homily 121. 1 Chron. xix. 13.	122

Homily 122. 1 Chron. xx. 1.	123
Homily 123. 1 Chron. xxi. 8	124
Homily 124. 1 Chron. xxii. 9, 10.	125
Homily 125. 1 Chron. xxiii. 13.	126
Homily 126. 1 Chron. xxiv. 5	127
Homily 127. 1 Chron. xxv. 5, 6.	128
Homily 128. 1 Chron. xxvi. 1	129
Homily 129. 1 Chron. xxvii. 31.	130
Homily 130. 1 Chron. xxviii. 20.	131
Homily 131. 1 Chron. xxix. 15.	132
Homily 132. 2 Chron. i. 11, 12.	133
Homily 133. 2 Chron. ii. 11	134
Homily 134. 2 Chron. iii. 17.	135
Homily 135. 2 Chron. iv. 18.	136
Homily 136. 2 Chron. v. 13.	137
Homily 137. 2 Chron. vi. 27	138
Homily 138. 2 Chron. vii. 1.	139
Homily 139. 2 Chron. viii. 11.	140
Homily 140. 2 Chron. ix. 1.	141
Homily 141. 2 Chron. x. 15	142
Homily 142. 2 Chron. xi. 16.	143
Homily 143. 2 Chron. xii. 14.	144
Homily 144. 2 Chron. xiii. 14.	145
Homily 145. 2 Chron. xiv. 11	146
Homily 146. 2 Chron. xv. 12.	147
Homily 147. 2 Chron. xvi. 9.	148
Homily 148. 2 Chron. xvii. 6.	149
Homily 149. 2 Chron. xviii. 7.	150
Homily 150. 2 Chron. xix. 2.	151
Homily 151. 2 Chron. xx. 21.	152
Homily 152. 2 Chron. xxi. 10.	153
Homily 153. 2 Chron. xxii. 12.	154

Homily 154. 2 Chron. xxiii. 21.	155
Homily 155. 2 Chron. xxiv. 20	156
Homily 156. 2 Chron. xxv. 9.	157
Homily 157. 2 Chron. xxvi. 15, 16.	158
Homily 158. 2 Chron. xxvii. 6	159
Homily 159. 2 Chron. xxviii. 15.	160
Homily 160. 2 Chron. xxix. 27.	161
Homily 161. 2 Chron. xxx. 18, 19.	162
Homily 162. 2 Chron. xxxi. 21.	163
Homily 163. 2 Chron. xxxii. 20.	164
Homily 164. 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12.	165
Homily 165. 2 Chron. xxxiv. 15, 18.	166
Homily 166. 2 Chron. xxxv. 4, 6, 10, 14, 15, 16.	167
Homily 167. 2 Chron. xxxvi. 15.	168
Homily 168. Ezra i. 1.	169
Homily 169. Ezra ii. 63.	170
Homily 170. Ezra iii. 3.	171
Homily 171. Ezra iv. 2.	172
Homily 172. Ezra v. 5.	173
Homily 173. Ezra vi. 22.	174
Homily 174. Ezra vii. 28.	175
Homily 175. Ezra viii. 29.	176
Homily 176. Ezra ix. 1.	177
Homily 177. Ezra x. 4.	178
Homily 178. Neh. i. 11.	179
Homily 179. Neh. ii. 4.	180
Homily 180. Neh. iii. 28.	181
Homily 181. Neh. iv. 14.	182
Homily 182. Neh. v. 15.	183
Homily 183. Neh. vi. 3.	184
Homily 184. Neh. vii. 64.	185
Homily 185. Neh. viii. 10.	186

Homily 186. Neh. ix. 2.	187
Homily 187. Neh. x. 39.	188
Homily 188. Neh. xii. 24, 36, 37, 45, 46.	190
Homily 189. Neh. xiii. 14, 22, 31.	191
Homily 190. Esther i. 22.	192
Homily 191. Esther ii. 7.	193
Homily 192. Esther iii. 2.	194
Homily 193. Esther iv. 14.	195
Homily 194. Esther v. 2.	196
Homily 195. Esther vi. 10.	197
Homily 196. Esther vii. 2.	198
Homily 197. Esther viii. 8.	199
Homily 198. Esther ix. 1.	200
Homily 199. Esther x. 3	201
Homily 200. Job i. 5	202
Homily 201. Job ii. 3.	203
Homily 202. Job iii. 1.	204
Homily 203. Job iv. 5	205
Homily 204. Job v. 18.	206
Homily 205. Job vi. 15	207
Homily 206. Job vii. 17, 18.	208
Homily 207. Job viii. 6.	209
Homily 208. Job ix. 31.	210
Homily 209. Job x. 21.	211
Homily 210. Job xi. 7.	212
Homily 211. Job xii. 11	213
Homily 212. Job xiii. 15.	214
Homily 213. Job xiv. 14	215
Homily 214. Job xv. 4.	216
Homily 215. Job xvi. 12	217
Homily 216. Job xvii. 9	218
Homily 217. Job xviii. 14.	219

Homily 218. Job xix. 25.	220
Homily 219. Job xx. 29.	221
Homily 220. Job xxi. 22.	222
Homily 221. Job xxii. 23.	223
Homily 222. Job xxiii. 3.	224
Homily 223. Job xxiv. 24	225
Homily 224. Job xxv. 4	226
Homily 225. Job xxvi. 14	227
Homily 226. Job xxvii. 6.	228
Homily 227. Job xxviii. 14	229
Homily 228. Job xxix. 2	230
Homily 229. Job xxx. 20	231
Homily 230. Job xxxi. 6.	232
Homily 231. Job xxxii. 8	233
Homily 232. Job xxxiii. 23.	234
Homily 233. Job xxxiv. 29.	235
Homily 234. Job xxxv. 10.	236
Homily 235. Job xxxvi. 5.	237
Homily 236. Job xxxvii. 21.	238
Homily 237. Job xxxviii. 31	239
Homily 238. Job xxxix. 1.	240
Homily 239. Job xl. 4.	241
Homily 240. Job xii. 10	242
Homily 241. Job xiii. 5, 6.	243
Indexes	244
Index of Scripture References	245
Index of Scripture Commentary	247



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Our Daily Homily

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"Peter: Fisherman, Disciple, Apostle."

ETC., ETC.

1 SAMUEL - JOB.

MARSHALL, MORGAN & SCOTT, LTD.,

LONDON & EDINBURGH.

"WELL — What are ages and the lapse of time
Match'd against truths, as lasting as sublime?
Can length of years on God Himself exact?
Or make that fiction, which was once a fact?
No — marble and recording brass decay,
And, like the graver's memory, pass away;
The works of man inherit, as is just,
Their author's frailty, and return to dust;
But Truth divine for ever stands secure,
Its head is guarded as its base is sure;
Fix'd in the rolling flood of endless years,
The pillar of the eternal plan appears,
The raving storm and dashing wave defies,
Built by that Architect who built the skies."

COWPER.

I have poured out my soul before the Lord. [1 Sam. i. 15.](#)

HANNAH'S soul was full of complaint and grief, which flowed over into her face and made it sorrowful. But when she had poured out her soul before the Lord, emptying out all its bitterness, the peace of God took the place of her soul-anguish, she went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad. What a glad exchange! How great the contrast! How much the better for herself, and for her home!

Is your face darkened by the bitterness of your soul? Perhaps the enemy has been vexing you sorely; or there is an unrealized hope, an unfulfilled purpose, in your life; or, perchance, the Lord seems to have forgotten you. Poor sufferer, there is nothing for it but to pour out your soul before the Lord. Empty out its contents in confession and prayer. God knows it all; yet tell Him, as if He knew nothing. "Ye people, pour out your hearts before Him. God is a refuge for us." "In everything, by prayer and supplication make your requests known unto God."

As we pour out our bitterness, God pours in his peace. Weeping goes out of one door whilst joy enters at another. We transmit the cup of tears to the Man of Sorrows, and He hands it back to us filled with the blessings of the new covenant. Some day you will come to the spot where you wept and prayed, bringing your offering of praise and thanksgiving.

His mother made him a little coat. [1 Sam. ii. 19.](#)

WHAT happy work it was! Those nimble fingers flew along the seams, because love inspired them. All her woman's art and wit were put into the garment, her one idea and ambition being to make something which should be not only useful, but becoming. Not mothers only, but fathers, are always making little coats for their children, which they wear long years after a material fabric would have become worn out. How many men and women are wearing today the coats which their parents cut out and made for them long years ago!

Habits are the vesture of the soul. The Apostle bade his converts put off the old man, "which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts," and to put on the new man, "which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness"; to put off anger, wrath, and malice, whilst they put on mercy, humility, and meekness. What words could better establish the fact that habits are (as the name indicates) the clothing of the inner life! Where and how are habits formed? Not in the mid-passage of life, but at its dawn; not in great crises, but in daily circumstances; not in life's arena, but in the home, amid the surroundings of earliest childhood. Oh that the spotless robe of Christ's righteousness may ever be exhibited before those with whom we daily come in contact!

By their behaviour to each other and to their children; by the ordering of the home-life; by their actions, more than by their words; by the way in which they speak, and spend their leisure hours, and pray — men and women are making the little coats which, for better or worse, their children wear ever after, and perhaps pass down to after generations.

And the Lord came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel! [1 Sam. iii. 10.](#)

SEE the urgency of God! Four times He came, and *stood*, and called. Mark how He *stands* at the door to knock. At first He was content to call the lad once by name; but after three unsuccessful attempts to attract him to Himself, He uttered the name twice, with strong urgency in the appeal, Samuel! Samuel! This has been called God's double knock. There are seven or eight of these double knocks in Scripture: Simon, Simon; Saul, Saul; Abraham, Abraham.

How may we be sure of a Divine call?

We may know God's call when it grows in intensity. — If an impression comes into your soul, and you are not quite sure of its origin, pray over it; above all, act on it so far as possible, follow in the direction in which it leads —and as you lift up your soul before God, it will wax or wane. If it wanes at all, abandon it. If it waxes follow it, though all hell attempt to stay you.

We may test God's call by the assistance of godly friends. — The aged Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child, and gave him good advice as to the manner in which he should respond to it. Our special gifts and the drift of our circumstances will also assuredly concur in one of God's calls.

We may test God's call by its effect on us. — Does it lead to self-denial? Does it induce us to leave the comfortable bed and step into the cold? Does it drive us forth to minister to others? Does it make us more unselfish, loving, tender, modest, humble! Whatever is to the humbling of our pride, and the glory of God, may be truly deemed God's call. Be quick to respond, and fearlessly deliver the message the Lord has given you.

Let us fetch the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. [1 Sam. iv. 3.](#)

ISRAEL had been defeated with great loss. Their only hope of being able to hold their own against the Philistines and the people of the land was in the protection and help vouchsafed to them by God. They knew this, and thought that they would be secured, if only the Ark of the covenant were on the field. They forgot that it was only the material symbol of a spiritual relationship; that it was useless unless that relationship was in living force; and that the bending forms of the cherubim, emblematic of the Divine protection, would not avail if their fellowship with the God of the cherubim had been ruptured by backsliding.

There is a sense in which we are always sending for the Ark. The reliance on outward rites, such as Baptism and the Lord's Supper, on the part of those who are alienated from the life of God ; the maintenance of the forms of prayer and Scripture-reading, which no longer express the passionate love of the soul; the habit of churchgoing, which so many practise, not because they love God, but because they think that it will in some way secure his alliance in life's battle — all these are forms in which we still fetch the Ark of the covenant, whilst our hearts are wrong with the God of the covenant.

It should never be forgotten that nothing can afford to us protection and succour but vital union with Christ. We must hide in his secret place if we would abide under his shadow. We must dwell in the most holy place if we would be shadowed by the wings of the Shekinah. There must be nothing between us and God, if we are to walk together, and enjoy fellowship with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the Ark of the Lord. [1 Sam. v. 3.](#)

THE idols of the heathen represent demons who are their accepted gods, just as the Ark was the symbol of the presence of Jehovah. In the one case there was a material representation of the demon; but in the case of the Ark there was only a throne, the Mercy Seat; and no attempt was made to represent the appearance of the God of Israel. When placed in the Holy of Holies, the Shekinah shone between the cherubim; this alone spoke of the Divine Spirit who filled the apparently vacant throne. When the effigy of the fish-god was confronted by the Sacred Ark, it was as though the demon spirit and the Divine Spirit had come into contact, with the inevitable result that the inferiority of the one ensured the crash of its effigy to the ground.

What a lesson this must have been to the Philistines — similar to that given Pharaoh in the plagues of Egypt, and with the same object of leading them to see the superior greatness of Jehovah! How great the encouragement to Israel — to know that God could defend his superiority! And how striking the prognostication for the future, when all the Dagon of the world shall be broken before the symbol of Divine power and love!

Bring the Ark of God into your life. Set it down in your heart, and forthwith the Dagon which have held sway for so long will one after another succumb. "The idols He will utterly abolish." Let Christ in — that is the one need of the soul; and let Him take full possession of you. Then He will do his own work. Darkness cannot abide light; nor the defilement of the Augean stable the turning in of the water of the river.

And the kine went along the highway, lowing as they went. [1 Sam. vi. 12.](#)

THAT two milch kine which had never borne the yoke should move quietly along the high road, turning neither to the right nor to the left, and lowing for the calves they had left behind, clearly indicated that they were possessed and guided by some mysterious power, which we know to have been God's. And if He were able thus to overpower the instincts of their nature, and to compel them to do his will, may we not infer that all circumstances, and all men, however unwittingly, and against their natural instinct, are subserving the purposes of his will, and bearing on the Ark? The fish yields the tribute money; the colt of the ass waits where two ways meet to bear the Redeemer; the man with the waterpot leads to the upper room; the Roman soldiers enable Paul to fulfil the mission of his life, in preaching the Gospel without hindrance in the very heart of Rome.

As we go forth into the world, let us believe that the movement of all things is towards the accomplishment of God's purpose. Herein is a fulfilment of the Psalmist's prediction about man, which can only be perfectly fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the second Adam — that all things are under his feet, all sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field. Everything serves Christ, and those who serve Christ. In a true sense all things are ours; they minister to us, even as Christ to God.

And against our natural inclinations let us always regard the claims of God as paramount; and dare to go his way, though our heart pines for those we leave behind. "He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter, more than Me, is not worthy of Me."

Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God. **1 Sam. vii 8.**

SAMUEL was famous for his prayers. They are repeatedly referred to in the brief record of his life. In the Psalms he is spoken of as the one "who called upon God's name." Indeed, he fought and won Israel's battles by his strong intercessions. Mary of Scots said that she dreaded the prayers of John Knox more than the battalions of the King of France. So his people were accustomed to think that if the prophet's hands were held out in importunate prayer, their foes must be restrained.

In the Life of Mr. Reginald Radcliffe, one who contributes a reminiscence interjects a remark which deserves to be carefully pondered: — "The great secret of the blessing which came from God to the awakening of whole districts, the quickening of Christians, and the salvation of multitudes, was prayer, continued, fervent, believing, expectant. There was never anything striking in the addresses; but through communion with the living Christ, the word came forth with living and life-giving power. Often would the forenoon be spent in continuous prayer." This may well convict some of us of the cause of our failure. We have expected the Lord to thunder and discomfort our Philistines, and with a great deliverance ; but we have ceased to cry unto the Lord.

Ye that are the Lord's remembrancers, cease not to cry unto Him. If the judge avenged the unfortunate widow, shall not God avenge his own elect, who cry day and night? It is recorded of our Lord that He prayed early and late, and all night. He prayed when He was about to be transfigured; for his disciples; in the Garden of Gethsemane; and for his murderers. How much more do we need to "pray without ceasing"!

But the thing displeased Samuel.... And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. [1 Sam. viii. 6.](#)

A LITTLE further down in the chapter we learn that Samuel rehearsed the words of the people unto the Lord. His prayer, to a large extent, was a rehearsal of all the strong and unkind things that the people had said to him; and in this way he passed them off his mind, and found relief. There is a suggestion of close communion with God in the expression, "He rehearsed them in the ears of the

Lord." It had been the habit of his life to be on intimate terms with his God.

Things do not always turn out as we had hoped, and we get displeased for our own sakes and God's. We had planned in one direction, but events have issued in another; and the results have threatened to become disastrous. There is but one resource. If we allow vexations to eat into our heart, they will corrode and injure it. We must rehearse them to God — spreading the letter before Him, as Hezekiah did; making request like Paul; crying like Samuel.

Surely it is the mistake of our life, that we carry our burdens instead of handing them over; that we worry instead of trusting; that we pray so little. The grass grows thick on the pathway to our oratory; the cobwebs hang across the doorway. The time we spend in prayer is perhaps better spent than in any other way. It was whilst Samuel prayed thus, that he saw the Divine programme for Israel:

"And he who at the sixth hour sought
The lone house-top to pray,
There gained a sight beyond his thought —
The dawn of Gentile day.
Then reckon not, when perils lour,
The time of prayer mis-spent;
Nor meanest chance, nor place, nor hour,
Without its heavenward bent."

Behold, there is in this city a man of God. 1 Sam. ix. 6.

THERE is a street in London, near St. Paul's, which I never traverse without very peculiar feelings. It is Godliman Street. Evidently the name is a corruption of *godly man*. Did some saint of God once live here, whose life was so holy as to give a sweet savour to the very street in which he dwelt? Were the neighbours who knew him best, the most sure of his godliness? Would that our piety might leave its mark on our neighbourhoods, and the memory linger long after we have passed away!

A generation or two ago in the Highlands, there were earnest and holy men who were known by the significant title of *the men*. No great religious gathering was deemed complete without them. Their prayers and exhortations were accompanied by an especial unction.

In such manner Samuel's godliness was recognised far and wide. The fragrance of his character could not be concealed. And this gave men confidence in him. They said, "He is an honourable man; all that he saith cometh surely to pass." How much credit redounds to godliness, when it is combined with trustworthiness and high credit amongst our fellows!

Let us seek to be God's men and women. Let us live not only soberly and righteously, but *godly*, in this present world. Let us remember that God hath set apart the godly for Himself. The godly are the godlike. They become so by cultivating the fellowship and friendship of God. Their faces become enlightened with his beauty; their words are weighty with his truth. After being for a little in their company, you detect the gravity, serenity, gentleness, beauty of holiness, which are the court manners of heaven.

Thou shalt do as occasion serve thee. [1 Sam. x. 7.](#)

THIS is an example of how God demands of us the use of our sanctified common-sense. Samuel sketches to Saul the course of events during the next few days; showing how clearly our lives lie naked and open to the eyes of God, and how easily He can reveal them when necessary. But whilst the various incidents are told, the prophet does not feel it incumbent to tell this goodly young man how he should behave in any given instance. "When these signs are come upon thee, thou shalt do as occasion serve thee."

We are reminded of a parallel in the life of Peter. The angel of God unbarred the prison-doors, and led him forth, because nothing short of Divine power would avail. He led the dazed Apostle through one street, because he was too bewildered to realize what had happened. But, as soon as the night-air had brought him to his senses, the angel left him "to consider the meitter" — to use his own judgment. The result of which was, that he went to the house of Mary.

One of the divinest of our faculties is the judgment, before which the reasons for and against a certain course of action must be adduced, but with which the ultimate decision lies. It is a tendency with some to depreciate the use of this wonderful power, by looking for signs and visions to point their path. This is a profound mistake. God will give these when there are complications in which the exercise of judgment might be at fault; but not where it is sufficient. Where no sign is given, carefully divest yourself of selfish considerations, weigh the pros and cons, ask for guidance, dare to act; and having acted in faith, never look back or doubt.

Come let us go to Gilgal, and renew the Kingdom there . 1 Sam. xi. 14.

IT is good to have days and occasions for renewing the kingdom. Already Saul had been anointed king. It was a recognised matter that he should inaugurate the days of the kings, as distinguished from those of the judges. But his great victory at Jabesh-Gilead seems to have wrought the enthusiasm of the people to the highest pitch, and to have presented a great opportunity for renewing the kingdom. They went to Gilgal to do this, because there, on the first entrance into Canaan, Israel had rolled away the reproach of uncircumcision, which symbolised their lack of separation.

Jesus is our King. The Father hath anointed Him, and set Him on his holy hill; and we have gladly assented to the appointment, and made Him King. But sometimes our sense of loyalty and devotion wanes. Insensibly we drift from our strenuous endeavour to act always as his devoted subjects. Therefore we need, from time to time, to renew the kingdom, and reverently make Him King before the Lord.

Go over the old solemn form of dedication; turn to the yellow leaves of the diary; bring under his sceptre any new provinces of influence that have been acquired; tell Him how glad and thankful you are to live only for Him. Let this be done at Gilgal, the place of circumcision and separation, with the Jordan of death flowing behind, and the Land of Promise beckoning in front. There is a sense in which we can consecrate ourselves only once; but we can renew our vows often.

"Blessings abound where'er He reigns;
The prisoner leaps to burst his chains;
The weary find eternal rest,
And all the sons of want are blest"

The Lord will not forsake his people for his great Name's sake. [1 Sam. xii. 22.](#)

THE certainty of our salvation rests on the character of God. Moses, years before, had pleaded that God could not afford to destroy or forsake Israel, lest the Egyptians and others should have some ground for saying that He was not able to carry out his purpose, or that He was fickle and changeable. "What wilt Thou do for thy great Name?" Samuel uses the same argument. We also may avail ourselves of it for our great comfort.

God knew what we should be — how weak and frail and changeful — before He arrested us and brought us to Himself. Speaking after the manner of men, we might say He counted the cost. He computed whether his resources were sufficient to secure us from our foes, keep us from falling, and present us faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy. He foreknew how much forbearance, pity, consolation, and tenderness, we should require. And yet it pleased Him to make us his people. He cannot, therefore, now run back from his purpose; otherwise it would seem that difficulties had arisen which either He had not anticipated, or was not so well able to combat as He had thought. What an absurd suggestion! In the former case there would be a slur on his omniscience; on the other, upon his omnipotence.

"What if God should cast you into hell?" was asked of an old Scotchwoman.

"Well," she answered, "If He do, all I can say is, He will lose mair than I will."

The gracious promise given to Joshua may be appropriated by every trembling saint of God: "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." To the poor and needy He says, "I the God of Israel will not forsake them."

I forced myself, therefore, and offered a burnt-offering. *1 Sam. xiii. 12.*

THIS was wholly outside Saul's province. Samuel had engaged to arrive within the seven days: they had nearly expired, and still there were no signs of the prophet; and Saul, yielding to the promptings of his impetuous nature, took the matter into his own hand, and rashly assumed an office to which he had no right. He protested that he had been very unwilling to add the function of priest to that of king. But this was notoriously contrary to the truth. For some time he had chafed against Samuel's prerogative, and now sought to supersede the Divine order.

It seemed but a small act, and, to superficial judgment, not enough to warrant the loss of his kingdom; but it was symptomatic of a great moral deficiency. He had not learned to obey the commandment of the Lord: how could he rule? He could not control the hasty suggestions of his own nature, in favour of the deliberate movement of the Divine order: how could he be God's chosen agent? He acted on the showings of expediency, rather than of faith: how could he be a man after God's own heart? The restlessness and haste which characterize the present age must not be allowed to affect our service for God; for thereby the progress of the Gospel will be hindered rather than helped.

We must learn to wait for God. He may not come till the allotted time has almost passed; but He will come. He waits for the exact moment in which He can best succour you. Not till patience has been exercised, but before it has given out. In the meanwhile, be sure that your safety is secured; He will see to it that the Philistines shall not come down to overwhelm you.

His eyes were enlightened. [1 Sam. xiv. 27.](#)

THE Philistines were in full flight. The Israelites followed hard at their heels through the wood. It was there that the honey dropped in rich abundance on the ground, and there Jonathan tasted a little, dipping the end of his rod into it. It made all the difference to him, warding off the excessive exhaustion which paralysed the rest of the army.

The Word of God is sweeter than the honeycomb. — Luscious to the sanctified taste; enlightening to the dimming eyes; strength-giving to the weary. It drops in abundance to the ground, as though inviting the hand of the Christian warrior or wayfarer to take it freely. If there is no taste for the *written* Word, it may be assumed that the *living* Word has not been enthroned in the heart; for where He reigns supreme, there is a longing for the food which alone can fit us for the Christian life.

Where we cannot take much, let us take some. — There was not time for Jonathan to sit down and take his fill. He could only catch up some as he hastily passed through the forest-glade; but that little made all the difference to him. So, in the early morning, or at mid-day, if we cannot fill our hearts with Scripture, we may catch up a morsel, which will minister untold refreshment, and clear our spiritual vision.

We specially need to do this when flushed with success. — Too often, when we have had success in the battles of the Lord — a good time in preaching or teaching — we are apt to congratulate ourselves, and suppose that we can live on the emotions excited. But, probably, there is no time when we need more absolutely to turn to the Word of God. In victory, as in defeat, we must be fed and nourished.

To obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. 1 Sam. xv. 22.

THIS is a great principle, which is repeatedly enforced throughout the Bible. Men have always been apt to divorce religion and morality, and to suppose that a certain tribute of sacrifice to God will be sufficient compensation for notorious evil-doing. But in every age God's servants have protested against the notion, and have insisted, as Samuel did with Saul, that it were better to obey, although there should be no spoil from which to select victims for sacrifice. This was Christ's perpetual protest against the Pharisees.

Let the Ritualist beware. — There is a grave fear lest extreme attention to the outward rite may be accompanied by carelessness to the inward temper. Where the outward observance is the expression of the attitude of the soul, it is to be respected even by those of us who feel that excessive symbolism is hostile to the devout life; but where the rite takes the place of the soul's devotion, or condones a lax morality, it cannot be too sternly deprecated. Though all the Levitical rites should be observed without flaw, they could not compensate for the persistent neglect of the least item of the decalogue. "God is a Spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

Let us all beware. — We are apt to make sacrifices of time and money and energy for God, and to comfort ourselves with the reflection that such as we are may be excused if in small lapses of temper, or disposition, we come short of the Divine standard. No; it cannot pass muster. One sin mastered, one temptation resisted, one duty performed, is dearer to God than the most costly sacrifices that were ever piled upon the altar.

The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. [1 Sam. xvi. 13](#).

WHAT may not a day bring forth! Here was a shepherd lad, summoned hastily from his sheep, and anointed king. But an even greater blessing came into his life that day, for he was mightily endued with the Holy Spirit. Without doubt, during his early years the Spirit of God had dwelt within him, moulding his character, inditing his songs; but, henceforth, the Spirit was to abide on him, as a Divine unction.

Why should not this day witness a similar transformation for *you*; not in the change of earthly position, but in your reception of the "power from on high" through a renewed endowment? Why should not the Spirit of the Lord come mightily upon you from this holy hour, even as your eyes glance down this page? Though it is quite possible that you have been empowered once, there is no finality in God's bestowals; the apostles were filled and filled again ([Acts ii.](#) and [iv.](#)).

The age of Pentecost in which we live is distinctly one of Divine anointing. It awaits all who will separate themselves to God, and receive it for his glory. The characteristic preposition of this age is *on*. If you have not received power, seek it; he that seeketh findeth; nay, receive it — to ask is to get. If the Master, though begotten of the Holy Spirit, forebore to preach the Gospel, and bind up broken hearts, till He had been anointed as the Christ by the Spirit, who descended on Him at his baptism; how foolish it is for us, who were born in sin, to attempt similar work, apart from similar endowment! The promise to each child of God is: "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto Me" ([Acts i. 8](#)).

The armies of the living God. [1 Sam. xvii. 26, 36.](#)

THIS made all the difference between David and the rest of the camp. To Saul and his soldiers God was an absentee — a name, but little else. They believed that He had done great things for his people in the past, and that at some future time, in the days of the Messiah, He might be expected to do great things again; but no one thought of Him as present. Keenly sensitive to the defiance of the Philistine, and grieved by the apathy of his people, David, on the other hand, felt that God was alive. He had lived alone with Him in the solitude of the hills, till God had become one of the greatest and most real facts of his young existence; and as the lad went to and fro among the armed warriors, he was sublimely conscious of the presence of the living God amid the clang of the camp.

This is what we need. To live so much with God, that when we come amongst men, whether in the bazaars of India or the market-place of an English town, we may be more aware of his over-shadowing presence than of the presence or absence of any one. Lo, God is here! This place is hallowed ground! But none can realize this by the act of the will. We can only find God everywhere when we carry Him everywhere. The miner sees by the candle he carries on his forehead.

Each of us is opposed by difficulties, privations, and trials of different sorts. But the one answer to them all is faith's vision of the Living God. We can face the mightiest foe in his name. If our faith can but make Him a passage, along which He shall come, there is no Goliath He will not quell; no question He will not answer; no need He will not meet

David behaved himself wisely. 1 Sam. xviii. 5, 14, 15, 30.

THERE must be some strong reason for the four-fold repetition of this phrase in so short a space. It is as though the Holy Ghost would lay very distinct stress on the Divine prudence and circumspection, which must characterise the man whose life is hid in God. Let us walk with God, abiding in Him, subjecting our thoughts and plans to his, communing about all things with Him, talking over our lives with Him, before we go out to live them in the presence of our fellows. Then we too shall have this gracious wisdom, which is more moral than intellectual — the product of the grace of God rather than of human culture.

Our life shall commend itself to men (5). — David's was good in the sight of all the people, and more wonderful still, in the sight of Saul's servants, who might have been jealous. A life lived in God disarms jealousy and envy. He who, as a boy, did his Father's business increased in wisdom, and in favour with God and men.

Our life shall rebuke and awe our foes (15). — Saul stood in awe of him. When traps and snares are laid for us we shall be enabled to thread our way through them all, as Jesus did when they tried to entangle Him in his talk. We shall have a wisdom which all our foes together shall not be able to gainsay or resist.

Our name will be precious (30). — People loved to dwell on the name of David; it was much set by; they noticed and were impressed with the beauty and nobility of his character. We must always view our lives, amusements, and undertakings, in the light of the result which will accrue to Him whose name it is our privilege to bear.

And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan. *1 Sam. xix. 6.*

IT was a noble act of Jonathan. He might have withdrawn from his friendship with David when it threatened his relations with his father; but, instead, he stepped into the breach, and pleaded for his friend, endeavouring to eradicate the false and ungenerous conceptions of which Saul had become possessed. It is an example we do well to study and copy. For his love's sake, as well as for his father's, he was extremely eager to effect a reconciliation between him to whom he owed allegiance of son and subject, and this fair shepherd-minstrel-warrior, who had so recently cast a sunny gleam upon his life.

Men often misconceive of one another. Jealousy and envy distort behaviour and actions which are in themselves as beautiful as possible. Misrepresentation will blind us to the true excellences of one another's characters. Wrong constructions are often put on the most innocent incidents. We cannot help these things, they are part of the sad heritage of the Fall; but we may often take up the cause of a misunderstood man, and at the risk of losing our own reputation, and diverting to ourselves some of the odium which attaches to him, we may stand as his sponsors.

Even if we dislike another, as Saul did David, let us give scope to the good Spirit to plead his cause at the bar of our hearts, as Jonathan did for his friend. Let us consider all the kind and loving things that may be said of him; let us put ourselves in his position; let us be willing to believe and hope all things. Let us plead for others, since this is a work in which Christ's followers most closely approximate to Him who ever liveth to intercede.

Thou shalt be missed, because thy seat will be empty. [1 Sam. xx. 18.](#)

JONATHAN and David had entered into a covenant, each loving the other as his own soul. Anxious to shield his friend from the wrath of his father, Jonathan discloses to David the plan by which he shall know how matters fared in the royal palace. David's vacant seat suggests a lesson for us.

There are a good many empty seats in our houses. Those that occupied them can never do so again; they have gone never to return again, and we miss them sorely.

Let us see to it that we do not leave our seats in the home circle needlessly vacant. Let not the mother be away at the dance, or even at the religious meeting, when she should be at home, joining in her children's evening prayers. Let the father be very sure that God has called him elsewhere, before he habitually vacates his place in the evening family circle. Let each of us avoid giving needless pain to those we love by leaving empty seats. But if God calls us away to his service, then for those who miss us, another Form shall glide in, and sit in the vacant chair; and they will become conscious that the Master is filling the gap, and beguiling the weary moments.

Above all, let not your seat be empty in the house of God, at the ordinary service, or at the Lord's Table. We are too prone to allow a trifle to deter us from joining in the sacred feasts. At such times we are missed, our empty seat witnesses against us; there is a lack in the song and prayer, which cries out against us; there is a distinct loss to the power of the service, which is in proportion to the number of earnest souls present. Oh that there may be no empty seats at the marriage supper, vacated through our unfaithfulness!

There is none like that; give it me. 1 Sam. xxi. 9.

WHAT David said of the sword of Goliath we may say of Holy Scripture — the sword of the Spirit — "There is none like that."

There is no book like the Bible for those convinced of sin. — The Word of God assures the sinner of God's love in Christ, whilst it refuses to condone a single sin, or excuse one shortcoming. The Bible is as stern as conscience herself against sin, but as pitiful as the heart of God to the sinner. It, moreover, discloses the method by which the just God becomes the justifier of those who believe.

There is no book like the Bible for the sorrowful. — It tells of the Comforter; it reminds us that in all our sorrow God also is sad; it points to the perfect plan according to which God is working out our blessedness; it insists that all things are working together for good; it opens the vision of the blessed future, where all the griefs and tears of men shall be put away for ever.

There is no book like the Bible for the dying. — "Read to me," said Sir Walter Scott, on his dying bed, to his friend. "What shall I read?" "There is only one book for a dying man," was the answer; "read to me from the Bible." The Book which tells of the Lord, who died and rose again; of the mansions which He has gone to prepare; of the reunion of the saints; of the fountains of water of life — is the only pillow on which the dying head can rest softly.

In these days of debate and doubt there is no such evidence for the Divine authority of the Bible as that which accrues from its perpetual use, whether in our own life, or in the conviction of the ungodly.

Till I know what God will do for me. [1 Sam. xxii. 3.](#)

WE shall never get to the end of all that God will do for us, if only we perfectly give ourselves up to Him. David had a very imperfect vision of all that was in God's plan for him; he had an inkling, but that was all. And we have still less. Yet let us recapitulate some of the things which God will do for us.

He waits to *give us the spirit of Sonship*: so that we may ever be conscious of his Fatherhood, and look up into his face in the garden of Gethsemane, and on the Mount of Transfiguration alike, calling Him Abba, Father.

He longs to *lead us to full consecration*; to lead us into such close association with Jesus in his redeeming purpose, that we may become his willing bond-servants, with no other purpose and aim in life than his service and glory.

He desires to *deliver us from all known sin*: that we may be blameless and harmless, his children without rebuke in this sinful world, who walk before Him in holiness and righteousness all our days.

He wants to *anoint us with the Holy Spirit*: so that our ministry to men may have more of the savour of Christ; may plough deeper furrows in human hearts; may have more abiding results.

He desires us to *come into partnership* with his Son — here in his redemptive purpose, yonder in his throne. To this indeed He calls us.

Who can know all that God waits to do, not here only, but yonder, when life has entered upon its eternal stage! "Now are we children of God; and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be" ([1 John iii. 2](#), R.V.).

He said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod. *1 Sam. xxiii. 9.*

DAVID was passing through one of the most awful experiences of his life, when his men spoke of -stoning him instead of taking up his cause. How many times in this chapter we are informed that David inquired of the Lord! Some three or four times the appeal for direction was renewed, as though he were fearful to stir one step by the light of his own unaided wisdom. In that changeful life of his, it must have been extremely difficult to set the Lord always before him, and await Divine direction. Many a time his circumstances might seem to demand immediate action rather than prayer; and the rude soldiery must have insisted on their voice being heard rather than a priest's; but David was not deterred by one or the other, and still held to his practice of consulting the Urim and Thummim stone, set in the ephod; which was probably a splendid diamond, flashing with God's distinct "Yes," or growing cloudy and dark with his definite "No."

Let us inquire of the Lord. The answer will surely come, if we wait for it. If we are not sure of it, let us still wait, for it will come — not so early as to save us from using our faith, not so late as to permit us to be overwhelmed. Direction will come in the growing conviction of duty, in the drift of circumstances, in the advice of friends, in the perceptions of a sanctified judgment. None that wait on God can be ashamed. Whether our duty be to arise and pursue, to sit still, or to escape — "the meek He will guide in judgment; the meek He will teach his way." He gives us a white stone in which a name is written, which only they know who receive.

And David's heart smote him. 1 Sam. xxiv. 5.

IT is well to have a tender conscience, and to obey its least monitions, even when men and things militate against it. Here was an opportunity for David and his band to end their wanderings and hardships by one thrust of the spear; but though it was a very small thing that he had done, David was struck with remorse for having taken advantage of Saul's retirement in the precincts of the cave, where his men and he were hiding, and cut off a piece of his robe.

It was a trifling matter, and yet it seemed dishonouring to God's anointed king; and as such it hurt David to have done it. We sometimes in conversation and criticism cut off a piece of a man's character, or influence for good, or standing in the esteem of others. Ought not our heart to smite us for such thoughtless conduct? Ought we not to make confession or reparation?

Circumstances seemed to favour it. — Of all the scores of caves in the neighbourhood, the king had happened to choose the very one, in the dark recesses of which David and his men were sheltering. What more natural than to obtain some token to convince the king how absolutely he had been in his young rival's power? But favouring circumstances do not justify an act which is not perfectly healthy and right. Opportunity does not make a wrong thing right.

His men unanimously approved the act, nay, they wanted him to go further. Their standard was a very low one, not only in this case, but in others. How wonderful that David kept such a high ideal amid such comrades! We shall not be judged hereafter by the standard which obtained among our comrades.

This shall be no grief unto thee. [1 Sam. xxv. 31.](#)

THERE was an inimitable blending of woman's wit with worldly prudence in the words of the beautiful Abigail. Poor woman, she had had a sorry life of it, mated to such a man as Nabal was! An ill-assorted pair certainly, though probably she had had no hand in bringing about the alliance. Like so many Eastern women, she was the creature of another's act and choice. But she succeeded in averting the blow which David was hasting to inflict, by asserting her belief that the time was not far distant when he would no longer be a fugitive from his foes, and by suggesting that when that happy time came it would be a relief to feel that he had not allowed himself to be carried to all lengths by his hot passion.

It was very salutary advice. Let us always look at things from the view-point of the future, when our passion shall have subsided, when time shall have cooled us, and especially when we review the present from the verge of the other world — how then?

We can well afford to do this since God is with us, and our life is bound up with Him in the bundle of life. Abigail reminded David that God would do to

him all the good of which He had spoken, and would sling out his enemies as from a sling. So God will do for us; not one good thing will fail of all that He hath promised; no weapon that is formed against us shall prosper. Within a little, Nabal was dead, and David's wrong righted. So shall the evil that now molests us pass away. God will deal with it. Let us leave it to Him: before Him mountains shall melt like wax; and we shall have nothing to regret.

Then said Saul, I have sinned. [1 Sam. xxvi. 21.](#)

THE Apostle makes a great distinction, and rightly, between the sorrow of the world and the sorrow of a godly repentance which needeth not to be repented of. Certainly Saul's confession of sin belonged to the former; whilst the cry of the latter comes out in [Psalm li.](#), extorted from David by the crimes of after years.

The difference between the two may be briefly summarized in this, that the one counts sin a folly and regrets its consequences; whilst the other regards sin as a crime done against the most Holy God, and regrets the pain given to Him. "Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight."

Obviously Saul's confession was of the former description, "I have played the fool." He recognised the unkingliness of his behaviour, and the futility of his efforts against David. But he stayed there, stopping short of a faithful recognition of his position in the sight of God, as weighed in the balances of eternal justice.

Many a time in Scripture do we meet with this confession. The Prodigal, Judas, Pharaoh, David, and Saul, uttered it; but in what differing tones, and with what differing motives! We need to winnow our words before God; not content with using the expressions of penitence, unless we are very sure that they bear the mint-mark of heaven, and deserve the master's Beatitude, "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted."

When sin is humbly confessed, the Saviour assures us: "Thy sins, which are many, are forgiven thee, go in peace." "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. "

And David said, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul. [1 Sam. xxvii. 1.](#)

WHAT a fit of despondency and unbelief was here! We can hardly believe that this is he who in so many psalms had boasted of the shepherd care of God, who had so often insisted on the safety of God's pavilion. It was a fainting fit, brought on by the bad air he had breathed amid the evil associations of Adullam's cave. Had not God promised to take care of him? Was not his future already guaranteed by the promises that he should succeed to the kingdom? But nothing availed to check his precipitate flight into the land of the Philistines.

Bitterly he rued this mistake. The prevarication and deceit to which he was driven; the anguish of having to march with Achish against his own people; the sack and burning of Ziklag : these were the price he had to pay for his mistrust. Unbelief always brings many other bitter sorrows in its train, and leads the soul to cry,

"How long, Lord? Wilt Thou forget me for ever?

How long wilt Thou hide thy face from me?"

Let us beware of losing heart, as David did. Look not at Saul, but at God, who is omnipotent; not at the winds and waves, but at Him who walks across the water; not at what may come, but at that which is — for the glorious Lord is round about thee to deliver thee. He shall deliver thy soul from death, thine eyes from tears, and thy feet from falling. He that has helped will help. What He has done, He will do. God always works from less to more, never from more to less. Dost thou not hear — hast thou not heard — his voice saying, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee? What, then, can man do unto thee? Every weapon used against thee shall go blunt on an invisible shield!

Because thou obeyest not the voice of the Lord, therefore . . . [1 Sam. xxviii. 18.](#)

THUS unforgiven sin comes back to a man. We cannot explain the mysteries that lie around this incident; but it is clear that in that supreme hour of Saul's fate, that early sin, which had never been confessed and put away, came surging back on the mind and heart of the terror-stricken monarch. "Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the Lord, and didst not execute his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the Lord done this thing unto thee This day. Moreover the Lord will deliver Israel also with thee into the hands of the Philistines" (R.V.). But Saul did not realize that even then the gates of God's love stood open to him, if only he would pass through them by humble penitence and faith. If instead of applying to the witch, he had sought God's mercy, light would have burst on his darkened path, and he had never perished by his own hand on Mount Gilboa.

In strong contrast with this, let us put the assurance of the new covenant: "Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." When God forgives, He blots out from the book of his remembrance. The sin is gone as a pebble in the ocean; as a cloud in the blue of a summer's sky.

Saul's was a sin of omission. The question was not what evil he had done, but the good he had failed to do. Let us remember that we need pardon for the sad lapses and failures of our lives, equally as for the positive transgressions. And if such things are not forgiven, they will lie heavy on our consciences when the shadows of death begin to gather around us. The New Testament especially judges those who knew and did not do — the slothful servant, the virgin without the oil, the priest that passed by on the other side.

What do these Hebrews here? [1 Sam. xxix. 3.](#)

IT was a very natural remark. The Philistines were going into battle with the Hebrew king and his troops, and it was very anomalous that a strong body of Hebrews should be forming part of the Philistine array. They had no business to be there. The annoyance of the chief captains and lords that surrounded Achish was natural enough. For long, probably, it had been smouldering; now it broke out into flame.

It is very terrible when the children of the world have a higher sense of Christian propriety and fitness than Christians themselves, and say to one another, "What do these Hebrews here?" The word "Hebrew" means one that has passed over — a separatist. The death of our Lord Jesus was intended to make all his followers separatists. Through Him they have passed from death unto life; they have been delivered out of the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son. The appeal of his cross to us all is, "Come out from among them, and be ye separate." Too often, however, that call is unheeded; and, for fear of man, we mingle with the ranks of the enemies of our Lord.

If Christians attend the theatre; if Sunday-school teachers, elders or deacons of a church, are found participating in the pleasures of the ungodly; if the young Christian man is found loosely consorting with the card-players of the smoking-room of an ocean steamer — may not the sneer go round, "What do these Hebrews here?" "What doest thou here, Elijah!" is the remonstrance of God. "What do these Hebrews here?" that of the world, which not unfrequently has a truer sense of propriety than God's professing followers.

David encouraged himself in the Lord his God. 1 Sam. xxx. 6.

HIS God! Doubtless the chronicler heard him say repeatedly, as he was so fond of saying, "My God, my God. " "I will say unto God, my rock, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Though he had seriously compromised God's cause, by the failure of his faith, by consorting with Achish and the Philistines, by a tortuous and treacherous policy, yet God was still his God; and, in the supreme crisis which had overtaken him, he naturally betook himself to the covert of those loving wings.

He encouraged himself. — He would go back on promises of forgiveness and succour, which had so often cheered him in similar straits. He would recall his songs in former nights as black as this, and therefore would have hope. He would remember that he had been brought through worse trials; and surely He who had helped him against Goliath and Saul would not fail him against the Amalekites. Besides, he had probably left his dear ones in the protection of the encamping angel; and though his faith might be tried, it could not be entirely disappointed. In this way he encouraged himself. All around was tumult and fear; but in God peace and rest brooded, as swans on a tranquil lake. His men might speak of stoning him; his heart be greatly distressed for wives and children; his life be in jeopardy: but God was a very present help, "Why art thou cast down, and disquieted, my soul? Hope thou in God."

In similar circumstances, let us have resort to similar sources of comfort; hide in God, and encourage ourselves in Him. It was in this spirit that John Knox, when about to face death, said to his wife, "Read to me where I first cast anchor."

All the valiant men . . . 1 Sam. xxxi. 11, 12.

THIS was a noble and generous act. At the beginning of his reign, in the early dawn of youthful promise and prowess, when he was the darling of the nation, Saul had interposed to deliver their beleagured city. And now, as the awful tidings of his defeat and suicide spread like fire through the country, the men whom he had succoured remembered his first kingly act, and showed their appreciation for his kindness by doing a strong and chivalrous deed in rescuing his remains from dishonour. They could not help him, but they could save his honour. When David heard of this act, he sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-Gilead, thanking them for their chivalrous devotion to the memory of the fallen king, and promising to requite the kindness as one done to the entire nation, and to himself

Are we careful enough of the honour and name of our dear Lord? He has done for us spiritually all that Saul did for Jabesh-Gilead, and more. He has delivered our soul from death, our eyes from tears, and our feet from falling. Let us be swift to maintain the honour of his name among those who are so apt at making it their scorn.

It was well that these men did not wait for others to act. Had they done so, the body of Saul might have rotted piecemeal on the walls of the temple at Bethshan. If they had left this act of reparation for Abner, or Ish-bosheth, it would never have been done. There is no order of precedence, when a wrong has to be righted, or a friend vindicated. The man who is next must act. Let us strike into the fray, and count that our opportunity is warrant enough. He who can, may.

Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives. [2 Sam. i. 23.](#)

IT was very lovely and pleasant of David to say so. He had no hesitation, of course, in saying this of his beloved Jonathan, every memory of whom was very pleasant, like a sweet strain of music, or the scent of the spring breeze; but he might have been excused for omitting Saul from the graceful and generous epithets he heaped on the kindred soul of his friend. But death had obliterated the sad, dark memories of recent days, and had transported the Psalmist across the dream of years to Saul as he was when he was first introduced to him. All that could be said in praise of the first Hebrew king was crowded into these glowing lines — the courage, martial prowess, swiftness to aid those who required help, his pleasantness and courtesy in address.

This is the love of God, which He breathes into the hearts of his children. They become perfect in love, as He is. "God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." It is God-like for his children to love their enemies, bless those who curse them, and pray for all who despitefully use and persecute them. Is such love ours? Do we forbear from thinking evil? Do we look on the virtues more often than the failures of our friends? Do we cast the mantle of forgiveness over the injuries done to us, and dwell tenderly on the excellences of our foes? Such is the love which never fails, but endures when faith has turned to fruition, and hope has realized its dreams.

We need most of all a baptism of love. A piece of clay will become fragrant if placed in contiguity to attar of roses. Let us lie where John did, on the bosom of incarnate love, till we begin to love as he.

The men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king. [2 Sam. ii. 4.](#)

THUS was David anointed a second time. Hitherto he had been the leader of a troop; now he became king of his own tribe: and his kingdom clustered around the ancient city of Hebron.

Typically, we learn that our blessed Lord will be acknowledged King of his own people, the Jews, before He is accepted by the world at large. Now, his kingdom is in mystery — it is in the Adullam stage. Men are gathering to Him from all quarters; but as yet the world does not recognise it in their political calculations. But ere long the Jews will recognise Him as King, and then we may begin to expect his enthronement over the populations of the globe. When they repent and are converted, times of repenting will come to all the world.

Experimentally we are taught, that as each new department of our life unfolds, we should give Christ a fresh coronation. The attitude which we took up years ago, of complete consecration, must be applied perpetually to each fresh development of experience. Each new step should be characterised by a definite waiting on God, that there may be a fresh endowment of power, a recharging of the spirit with his might. Was He King in the cave, then be sure to acknowledge Him as such, now that you are called from obscurity into the glare of noon. Whenever God says, by the circumstances of your life, Go up; always kneel at the feet of Jesus, saying, "Lord, in the very little I found my joy and strength in serving Thee only; and now, amid the greater responsibility and publicity of my life, I desire to be thy earnest, simple-minded, whole-hearted follower."

Have you anointed Jesus as your King? Do not fail. Remember how near of kin He is.

David wared stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul wared weaker. [2 Sam. iii. 1.](#)

THE war between the flesh and the Spirit is long, but the end is sure. As the Baptist said of Jesus, so must the flesh say of the Spirit, He must increase; I must decrease. Sometimes, in the long strain of the war, our spirit dies down. Will the bugle never cease to ring out its alarm? Will the assaults never come, to an end? When shall we be able to lay aside sword and breastplate, and to enter the land of rest? Oh to be able to say with the Apostle, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith"!

Yet take heart. The assaults diminish in frequency and strength in proportion as they are faithfully resisted. Each time you resist successfully you will find it easier to resist. The strength of the vanquished foe enters the vanquisher.

Moreover, ultimate victory is secured. " Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God? " ([1 John v. 4, 5](#)). It makes a great difference to the soldier, when he belongs to an All-Victorious Legion, and serves under a Captain that never lost a fight. And there can be no doubt as to the issue in your heart or mine. "He must reign till He has put all enemies under his feet."

At any moment we may look for the sudden collapse of a great portion of the confederacy of evil, which has so long menaced us; as when Abner suddenly came to Hebron to give in his adhesion to David. What a hugh piece of cliff fell that day into the sea! Expect the sudden collapse of evils which have long troubled you.

As the Lord liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity. [2 Sam. iv. 9.](#)

IT was the mid-day of David's life, and, looking back, he saw how good the Lord had been to him. Step by step God had brought him up out of a horrible pit, and from the miry clay, setting him upon a rock, and establishing his goings. What need was there, then, that men should interfere to hasten the unfolding of the Divine purposes? It had been his lifelong habit to wait. Whatever he needed he looked to God to supply. Whatever difficulties blocked his path, he looked to God to remove. Whatever men stood in his way, he looked to God to deal with them. Twice in the wilderness he refused to take Saul's life. He had executed the Amalekite because he claimed to have slain Saul on Gilboa. And, in pursuance of the same policy, he could have no complicity in the act of the murderers of Ishbosheth, even though they made his way clear to the throne of Israel.

Let God redeem thee out of all thine adversities. Do not lose heart or hope. Do not put forth thy hand to snatch at any position or deliverance by an act which might afterwards cause thee shame or sorrow. "Trust in the Lord, and do good. Roll thy way upon the Lord. Trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass. Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him" ([Psa. xxxvii. 3-7](#), R.V.). He who turns glaciers to rivers that pass away, will remove all thy difficulties and perplexities. He shall cause thee to inherit the land. He will promote thee in due time, and give thee to see thy desire upon thine enemies. He who redeemed thy soul by his most precious blood cannot fail thee, however long He may tarry. Remember that He ever liveth, and loveth, and reigneth

And David took him more wives out of Jerusalem. [2 Sam. v. 13.](#)

THIS is terribly disappointing! According to the ideas of the surrounding nations, the greatness of a monarch was gauged by the extent of his harem. But the law of Moses put severe restraint on the multiplication of wives, "that his heart turn not away " ([Deut. xvii. 17](#)). It seems as though the soul of David sank into sensual indulgence and luxuriance. It lost much of its early hardihood and strength in consequence; and at this period of his life those seeds were sown, which in after years brought forth such a plentiful and terrible harvest of anguish, murder, and impurity, in his family.

Few of us realize how much our character owes to the stern discipline to which God subjects us. The only way to keep us healthy and vigorous is to send us many a nipping frost, many a keen northern blast. The bleak hillside breeds stronger natures than the warm sheltered valley. The difference between Anglo-Saxon and Negro is largely wrought by temperature and soil. The campaign, with its strain on every power of endurance, trains better soldiers than the barracks. As David was a stronger, better man, when hunted like a coney in the rocks of Engedi, so are we braced to a nobler life, when all things seem against us.

Few of us can be trusted with unbroken happiness. God is compelled to withhold what the flesh craves. But where prosperity has shone on your path, be very careful not to abuse it. Consider it as indicating God's loving trust in you. He would rather convey his lesson in sunshine than in storm. But walk carefully and humbly, looking to Him constantly for daily grace, and never relaxing the girdle about the loin.

They set the Ark of God upon a new cart. *2 Sam. vi. 3.*

THIS was their mistake. The Divine directions were explicit that the Ark of the living God must be carried on the shoulders of living men. There would have been no stumbling of oxen, no swaying of the Ark to falling, no need for Uzzah to reach out his hand, if only this simple direction had been obeyed. This breaking forth of God was to recall men to simple absolute obedience to the rules and regulations that had been so explicitly laid down in the Levitical code. It could not fall into disuse without grave loss to the entire people. Better that one life should be sacrificed for disobedience than that the whole nation should be impoverished for the relaxation of that ancient law.

We are fond of bringing new carts to God. At every birthday we build the new cart of good resolution, and place thereon the Ark of God. We will be different, and on our fresh endeavours the Lord of Hosts shall ride; but we must drive, and if needs be, steady the Ark. Ah! it is not long before the oxen stumble, and Uzzah who drives is smitten to the dust of death.

God wants, not new carts, but the living shoulders of consecrated men. We must live for Him, surrendering ourselves to his service; not driving, but being driven; not conducting, but being impelled; not imposing our thoughts on Him, but being willing to submit ourselves absolutely to Him. There is no need to fear God, if only we will obey Him, and in obedience discover the laws by which we may approach and serve Him. Then the power which otherwise flames forth to destroy will become the useful servant of our faith, and we shall be able to undertake great things for God.

Do as Thou hast said. [2 Sam. vii. 25.](#)

THIS is the voice of a childlike faith.

Note what led to these words. — Nathan had just unfolded to the king all the purposes of God's heart towards him. That He would establish his throne, deliver him from his enemies, and set up his dynasty to succeed him — this and much else. David's heart was full of joy and gladness — he knew that God would not run back from his word; but he felt none the less the duty of claiming the fulfilments of these guarantees. So it is with all the promises of God; though they are Yea and Amen in Christ, it is requisite for us to put our hand on them; plead them before God; and claim their fulfilment with appropriating faith.

Notice the attitude in which David uttered these words. — "He sat before the Lord." Was not this the position of rest and trust? On another occasion, he lay all night upon the earth (xii. 16), in an agony of prayer, because not sure of God's purpose, and hoping to turn God by the extremity of his anguish. But there is a marvellous alteration in the tone of our prayer, so soon as we can base it on the declared purposes of God. We enter into his rest; we put ourselves in the current of his purposes; we sit before the Lord.

Mark the blessedness of communion with God. — It is as a man talks with his friend. We are not retired always to kneel when we pray, or to con over a certain form of words; we can sit and talk with God, catching up his words as they fall on our hearts, and reflecting them back on Him in praise, and prayer, and happy converse. All true prayer originates in the declarations of God's love, to each of which we answer, *Do as Thou hast said.*

The silver and gold he had dedicated of all nations which he subdued. [2 Sam. viii. 11.](#)

DAVID might not build the temple, but he was bent on making provision for it. Indeed, Solomon had never been able to do as he did, unless his father had gathered these stores of gold and silver. Thus other men labour, and we enter into their labours; but the accomplished building is credited by God to each. He does not forget David when Solomon's temple stands complete. The reward is proportioned to each man's service, according to his share.

It is a glorious thing when we not only defeat our foes, but get spoils out of their overthrow which we can use for the service of God and man. It is as possible for us as for David. Out of our failures, temptations, mistakes, let us get the power of helping and directing others. In death Jesus won the keys of death and Hades, and the power to become a merciful and faithful High Priest; and now He ever liveth to make intercession for his people ([Heb. vii. 25](#)).

But the main lesson of this chapter is the foreshadowing of God's purpose, that Gentiles should contribute to the building of his Temple. What was literally true in the case of the temple of Solomon, is spiritually true of the heavenly Temple, the Church. From every nation, and kindred, people and tongue, souls are being gathered, who form a spiritual house, a holy Temple in the Lord. The whole world is destined to contribute to that structure, which is being prepared secretly and mystically, but shall ere long be manifested in its full glory. It is very interesting to get this suggestion from the chronicles of a nation so exclusive and haughty as the Jews. "They shall come from the East and West"

Thou shalt eat bread at my table continually. [2 Sam. ix. 7.](#)

FOUR times in this chapter we are told of the lame man eating bread at the royal table. But what are these facts recorded and repeated for, save to accentuate the infinite blessings which come to us through the Divine love!

Mephibosheth had done nothing to merit the royal favour. Not a word is said of his being well-

favoured and attractive. So far from that, he was lame on both his feet, and probably a sickly invalid. In his own judgment he was worthless as a dead dog. His state was impoverished; no deed of prowess could win David's notice; he was almost entirely at the mercy of his servant, Ziba. In these respects there are many analogies to our own condition in the sight of God. We are lame indeed; and, so far as we are concerned, it is quite impossible that we should ever win the Divine regard, or sit at his table among his sons.

But between David and Jonathan a covenant had been struck, which had provided for the children of the ill-fated Jonathan ([1 Sam. xx. 14-16](#)). It was because of this sacred obligation that Mephibosheth fared as he did. Look away, child of God, to the covenant struck between God and thy representative, the Son of his love. It is idle of thee to seek to propitiate the Divine favour, or earn a seat at his table; but if thou art willing to identify thyself with thy Lord, and to shelter thyself in Him by the living union of faith; if thou canst base thy plea on the Blood of the everlasting covenant — then the provisions of that covenant between Father and Son shall be extended to thee: and because of God's love to Jesus thou shalt sit at the Divine table, and be regarded as one of the heirs of the great King.

The Lord do that which seemeth Him good. 2 Sam. x. 12.

ISRAEL was arrayed against overwhelming odds. To human sight it must have appeared very improbable that Joab would be able to hold his own. However, he made the best arrangements he could; exhorted his men to be of good courage and do their utmost; and then piously left the issue to the God of battles.

There are times in all lives when the case seems desperate. How can we meet with ten thousand him who cometh against us with twenty thousand! Heart and flesh fail. What resource is there, then save in *the flight of the lonely man to the only God*? It is for God to act, since the help of man is vain.

In your personal straits. — When patience is exhausted; when the last handful is taken from the barrel; when complicated trials meet and hem you in; when the iron gate and the keepers before the door appear to render escape impossible — then look up, God is marching with reinforcements to your aid.

In your work and war for God in the world. — We too often act and speak as if success were to be won by the forces that we may be able to bring into the field, whereas God asks us for nothing more than fidelity and the right disposition of such forces as we can command; He will do all the rest.

In your outlook on the conflict between good and evil. — It is quite true that there appears to be an infinite disparity between the one and the other. But there are other forces in the field than appear. There is another host of which God Himself is captain. When the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord lifts up the standard. "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven to thy help."

David tarried still at Jerusalem. [2 Sam. xi. 1.](#)

AH! fatal dalliance in the arms of sensual ease! It led to David's undoing. It was the time of the year when kings generally went forth to the fight; and in earlier days David would never have thought of leaving to Joab or others the strain and stress of conflict when there were hard knocks to give and take. Indeed, on more than one occasion his followers had remonstrated against his exposing the Light of Israel to the risks of the battlefield. But now he sends Joab and his mighty men to fight against Ammon, while he tarries securely at Jerusalem. In this fatal lethargy he betrays the deterioration of his soul. Already the walls were broken down, and entrance into the citadel was easy. We are not surprised to learn that as he sauntered lazily on his palace roof in the sultry afternoon he was swept away before the rush of sudden passion, and took the poor man's ewe lamb to satisfy the voracious, hungry impulse which suddenly came to him.

Beware of hours of ease! Rest is necessary; times of recruiting and renewal must come to us all; nature positively demands re-creation; but there must be no neglect of known duty, no handing over to others of what we might and could do ourselves, no tarrying behind the march of the troops when we should go forth with them to the battle. Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. Be most on guard when not actively engaged against the enemy. One unlocked gate may admit the foe to the citadel of the life, and rob you of peace for all after-days. The luxury of the plains of Capua was more fatal to the soldiers of Hannibal than the passage of the Alps.

And David went to Rabboh, and fought against it, and took it. [2 Sam. xii. 29.](#)

VICTORY might seem to have been for ever forfeited after so great a fall. We could not have been surprised had we been told that from this time onward the course of David's conquests had stayed. And yet this thought would be a misconception of God's dealings with the penitent. Where there is true contrition, confession, and faith, He not only forgives, but restores; He not only restores to the enjoyment of his favour, but reinstates in opportunities of usefulness. So Jesus not only met the apostle who had denied Him, and put him back into the old position of happy fellowship, but gave him a commission to feed his sheep and lambs.

We have sometimes met backsliders who have doubted the possibility of their forgiveness; or, if they have realized this, they have never dared to hope that they could ever be what they had been. And so long as faith refuses to believe in the perfect work of God's love, it must inevitably take a back seat. Let us seek for such an entire faith in God's forgiving and restoring love as to dare to believe that we are put again into the old place, and allowed to anticipate the same victories as aforetime. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" ([1 John i. 9.](#)).

Directly David said, "I have sinned," in the dash of a moment Nathan said, "The Lord hath put away thy sin"; and when Joab sent tidings that Rabbah was about to fall, David was permitted the honour of its final capture, though it had been associated so closely with Uriah's death. Where sin abounds grace superabounds, and reigns through righteousness. Dare to believe this.

Then the king arose, and tare his garments, and lay on the earth. [2 Sam. xiii. 31.](#)

THROUGHOUT the incidents of this chapter, the soul of David touched the bottom of the sea of anguish and remorse. The circumstances narrated were in themselves sad enough; but there was a more bitter element in them for David, because he knew that they were the harvest of which his own sin was the seed. Here began to be fulfilled the sentence of God through Nathan, "The sword shall never depart from thine house."

He had broken up the peace of another's home, and peace had quitted his home, never to return. He had defiled the purity of Uriah's wife, and the purity of his own daughter had been trampled under foot. He had smitten Uriah, and now Absalom had murdered Amnon. Through those awful hours when the entire fate of the whole of his family seemed trembling in the balance, he drank to the dregs the cup of bitterness. Oh, how true are the apostle's words: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting."

Sin resembles the Australian weed, which when once it is sown in the waters will spread with such rapidity as to spoil their beauty, and choke their flow. We must distinguish between the penal and natural results. The penal were borne by Christ for us all, and are remitted for evermore; but the natural remain even to forgiven penitents, as they did to David. Still, God's grace may transmute them into blessings, and cause pearls to grow where before there had been gaping wounds. Ask God to take in hand the natural consequences of your sins, and make them means of grace and ennoblement.

Yet doth He devise means that his banished be not expelled from Him. [2 Sam. xiv. 14.](#)

THE means that David devised were really inadequate. He allowed his heart to dictate to his royal sense of justice and rectitude, and permitted Absalom to return to his country and home without one word of confession, one symptom of penitence. The king was overmastered by the father; and the result was disastrous. It shook the respect of his people, undermined the foundations of just government, slackened the bands of every family in the land, and confirmed Absalom in his wilful and obstinate career. "What!" said he to himself, "does my father bid me come back without conditions? Does he demand no confession or reparation? Then he condones my sin."

Let parents be warned. If your children disobey, and violate the rules of your home, you have no right to treat them as you did before, until they have owned their sin. You must insist on penitence, confession, and reparation, though it take hours or days or even weeks of suffering and pleading to bring it about.

Into what relief does David's mistake throw God's way of forgiveness and salvation! Had he acted as David, and as so many wish us to believe, He would have reinstated the human family in the Paradise of his love without waiting for the work of the Mediator, or the confession of the prodigal. By the arbitrary exercise of his sovereign will He might have wiped out the record of our sins %without our concurrence. But it would have been to the irreparable undoing of man. Hence it behoved Christ to suffer, by his blood making an atonement for our sins, and by his Spirit bringing us to penitence and confession.

Here am I, let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him. [2 Sam. xv. 26.](#)

THERE is the patience of hope. We love to gird ourselves in the vehemence of our self-will, to go where we choose, to rule the lives of others; but as the years pass and our pride is humbled, the sinews of our strength slackened, and the radiance of early prospects overcast, we are willing to hand ourselves over to our Father, saying, "Behold, here am I; let Him do to me as seemeth good unto Him."

It was thus that Isaac was passive in the hands of Abraham. It was thus that Jesus spoke to his Father, "I come to do thy will, my God." It was thus that the maiden who was blessed above women, answered the angel's message. It was thus that Paul, when urged not to go up to Jerusalem, avowed his willingness to live or die, as the Lord might choose.

God is ever working upon us through circumstances; and, as in the present case, sometimes He overrules the plottings of wicked men to fulfil his Divine purpose. His will is sometimes brought to us in a cup which a Judas holds to our lips. How blessed to be able to say, as we go forth to meet our Father's will, Behold, here am I! and to look beyond the plottings and machinations of our enemies to One who loves us infinitely. Whatever He permits must be good. Good, if driven as an exile from our home; good, if exposed to the revilings of a Shimei; good, if the heart breaks in bitter tears. All must be good which the good Lord permits or appoints. Many were the afflictions of David, but out of them all he was delivered. When he had learnt the lesson, the rod was stayed. God did not take away his mercy from him. Thou too art in his hands, and He will certainly bring thee again, and show thee the city and his habitation.

The king and all the people came weary, and refreshed themselves there. [2 Sam. xvi. 14.](#)

A GREAT weariness falls often on our souls. We are wearied because of the greatness of our way, and inclined to say there is no hope. Memory tires us, perpetually casting up the record of past unfaithfulness and transgression. The bitter way of the natural consequences of sin is toilsome and difficult to the feet. We faint before the averted eye of former friends and the pitiless criticism of foes. Longings for a vanished past, for life and love, for purity and peace, grind heavily in the soul. Our King has known something of human weariness, though not from all the sources that cause it in his subjects.

But amid the presence of our weariness the voice of God may be heard saying, "This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest, and this is the refreshing." There is rest for weary souls beneath the shadow of the cross, in the sight of which the burden rolls away. There is rest and refreshment as we sit in the banqueting house of Christ's manifested and realized affection. There is refreshment as we eat of his flesh and drink of his blood; as we yield our will to his; as we sit with Him in heavenly places. We assuredly find Him to be "a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" ([Isa. xxxii. 2](#)).

There is no hill Difficulty without its arbour; no desert without its oasis; no sultry heat without its shadow of a great rock; no weariness without its pillow ; no intolerable sorrow without its solace; no weariness without its refreshment; no failure of man without a very present help in God.

Arise, and pass quickly over the water. [2 Sam. xvii. 21.](#)

THE water of Jordan may serve as an illustration for our position. Our David has passed over the waters of death and in doing so has taken us with Him. There is a sense in which in the morning light of Easter Day all who believed passed over with Him, so that "by the morning light there lacked not one of them that was not gone over Jordan."

We all hold the doctrine of *Substitution*. Do we sufficiently realize that of *Identification*? Not only did Jesus die for us, but we died with and in Him. In Him, as the true Noah's Ark, the whole Church passed over the Jordan of death from the old world to the new. There are some who do not understand that in the purpose of God we are already standing on resurrection ground. Across the water we can hear the murmur of the world, and detect its corruption; but we are the inheritors of the world in which there is no death nor corruption nor the dominion of sin. When a man realizes this he no longer braces himself up to meet death, because he knows that in the person of Christ he has left it behind for ever.

What is true, however, in God's purpose should be the aim and goal of our daily striving. To us there comes the unceasing call, "Arise, and go over Jordan." There is always a thither and a hither side for every experience and act. We may always do as the world does; this is to stay on the death side. We may always do as Christ does; this is to pass over to the risen and living side. Reckon that you have died, and mortify the deeds of your body. "And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the spirit is life because of righteousness."

"

Wherefore wilt thou run? . . . Come what may, said he, I will run. [2 Sam. xviii. 22, 23](#) (R.V.).

MOAB did not love David, as Ahimaaz did, and could not understand what made the young man so eager to carry the tidings. Doubtless Ahimaaz and Cushie entirely misinterpreted the heart of David, and thought that he would be glad to hear that the rebellion was stamped out, and Absalom was dead. And it was because of the pleasure which he thought to give his king that the swift-footed son of Zadok pleaded for permission to run. What though there would be no reward, or that it would fall to the lot of Cushie, who had already started at Joab's command — that mattered not, the love of David constrained him.

How often that question of reward is thrown at the servants of God! It is one of the favourite taunts of the world; as Satan said of Job, that we do as we do because we are paid. "Doth Job serve God for nought?" And nothing so startles men as disinterested service. They cannot account for it; but it wins their respect. "Reward or no reward; recompense or none; smiles or tears, come what may, let me run." That is the spirit that becomes a Christian, and convinces the world. "The love, of Christ constraineth us."

Ahimaaz outran Cushie. The one was a volunteer for love's dear sake; the other, a bond-servant, doing as he was told. Love lent wings to his feet, and speeding past his fellow bore him first into David's presence. So God's will is done in heaven: "The cherubim ran and returned like a flash of lightning." So God's will is done on earth: "They departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring his disciples word. And behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail!"

The King is near of kin to us. [2 Sam. xix. 42.](#)

THERE are two derivations for the word *king*: one from the word *can* — the king is the man that can do things; the other from the word *kin* — the king is closely related to us, of our kith and kin. In either case, there is a beautiful meaning, as touching our Lord and Saviour. He is King, because He has overcome our enemies, and can overcome. He is King, because He has taken on Himself our flesh and blood, and has for ever made us one with Himself. The King is our kinsman. Our kinsman is King.

It is very comforting to know how really our Lord has identified Himself with us. The Gospels are full of the wonderful story. His kinship was manifested in —

His Prayers. — He bade us speak to God as our Father; in that marvellous possessive pronoun, not only linking us all to one another, but including Himself in our petitions, save when we ask for forgiveness.

His Infirmities. — "We have not a high priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." His hunger and thirst; his weariness and exhaustion; his suffering unto death — all accentuate the closeness of the tie between us.

His Temptation. — "In all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." The avenues through which the tempter could approach Him were those by which He assails us also. No temptation took Him, but such as is common to man. So to every lonely soldier of his He draws near, saying, "Be of good cheer; I have passed through it all. I am your brother in the fight; I feel for you with a quick sympathy; the glories of my throne do not alter my true-hearted love."

The men of Judah clave unto their King. [2 Sam. xx. 2.](#)

WE are reminded of the exhortation of the good Barnabas, that with purpose of heart the converts of Antioch should cleave unto the Lord. This is the test of a true faith. We often come to the dividing of the paths. We stand on the watershed of the hills: that way leads back to Moab with its fascinations; this on to Canaan with its spiritual attractions. Orpah and Ruth must choose. Each is equally profuse in speeches and tears; but the ultimate test of love is whether they will stay or go. Which will cleave to the widowed Naomi? She is the truest lover; her fidelity will attest the fervour and strength of her affection. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, and returned to her people and her gods, while Ruth "clave unto her."

We must cleave to Jesus, *in spite of the derision of the multitude*. We must be prepared to stand with Him when He stands alone, or goes forth alone to die. We must be willing to stem the mighty tide of the world which has left Him and pours past us. Though all forsake Him, yet we must cleave.

We must cleave to Jesus, *in spite of the rebellion of the flesh*. Our whole nature may sometimes rise in insurrection, demanding some forbidden fruit. It is no child's play then for the lonely will to stand by itself in unshaken fidelity and loyalty; but it must.

We must cleave to Jesus *when He seems to rebuff us*. Only those who can stand so sharp an ordeal, are exposed to it. But sometimes we are called to pass through it as Job, that angels may learn how Christ's lovers cling to Him, not for his gifts, but for Himself.

Because he slew the Gibeonites. [2 Sam. xxi. 1.](#)

THE Gibeonites were under the protection of a special covenant, which had been entered into between them and Joshua. That covenant was the outcome of a ruse on their part. But since it had been most solemnly made by the leaders of Israel, it held good. The fact of their deceit and chicanery could not absolve Israel from the oath which had been passed for their safety. For centuries the provisions of this covenant had been observed, till Saul invaded them, and slew the Gibeonites. This was a grievous sin, which, according to the religious light of the time, seemed to demand blood; and David proposed to atone for blood by blood. Nothing but blood could atone for sin so black and dark.

We are also protected by a covenant, into which the Father has entered with the Son, not for our worthiness or merit, but only because He would. The provisions of that covenant engage to take us to be his people, to remember our sins no more, and to make the Divine law the object of our love ([Heb. viii.](#)). And the argument is irresistible, that if man is so mindful of a covenant as to feel that its infraction is a sin which can only be expiated by blood-shedding, it is impossible to suppose that God will ever run back from his.

my soul, thou mayest rest secure in this: here is an everlasting rock; this foundation shall suffice thee for evermore. Thou art in the Son of his love. Though thou art sinful and evil, yet thou art included in the covenant which is more lasting than that of day and night. Jesus has met its conditions on thy behalf, and has undertaken to secure thy obedience and holiness.

Thy gentleness hath made me great. [2 Sam. xxii. 36.](#)

THE triumph of God's gentle goodness will be our song for ever. In those far distant ages, when we look back on our earthly course, as a grown man on his boyhood, and when the words of this Psalm shall express our glad emotions, we shall recognise that the Hand which brought us thither was as gentle as our mother's; and that the things we craved, but failth to receive, were withheld by his gentle goodness. Our history tells what gentleness will do.

The Apostle besought the Corinthian converts by the gentleness of Christ ([2 Cor. x. 1](#)). Though there were abuses amongst them that seemed to call for stringent dealing, he felt that they could be best removed by the gentle love which he had learned from the heart of Christ. The wisdom which is from above is gentle as well as pure; and in dealing with the sin that chokes our growth, it is probable that gentleness will do more than severity. The gentleness of the nurse that cherishes her children; of the lover to her whom he cherishes above himself; of the infinite love which bears and endures to the uttermost — is the furnace before which the foul ingredients of our hearts are driven never to return. We might brave the lion; we are vanquished by the Lamb. We could withstand the scathing look of scorn; but when the gentle Lord casts on us the look of ineffable tenderness, we go out to weep bitterly.

That He has borne with us so lovingly; that He has filled our lives with mercy even when compelled to correct; that He has never altered in his tender behaviour towards us; that He has returned our rebuffs and slights with meekness and forbearance; that He has never wearied of us — this is an everlasting tribute to the gentleness that makes great.

As the light of the morning when the sun riseth, a morning without clouds. [2 Sam. xxiii. 4.](#)

THE dealings of God with man are compared to morning light, and the sprouting of tender grass in the sunshine that follows rain. The one may refer to youth, and the other to age. In each there is sunlight: in the one case it is before the clouds have gathered; in the other after they have dispersed.

Clouds. — There are many different sorts: the cirrus, like platines in the sky; the cumulus, in heaps, like the summits of distant mountains; the strata, or long bars; the nimbus, heavy with shower. There is a counterpart for each in human life, without which we should miss much of those experiences of light and shade that so frequently reveal the nature of the light. We should not know God's comfort and very present help, if it were not for the clouds which are born in the marsh-lands of trouble. Who does not prefer the changeful beauty of an English spring to the unclouded blue of Italian skies?

The Light of the Morning. — The love of God steals over hearts as the dawn. He is the Rock; but his advent breaks gently as light. So God's love came to Lydia, whose heart opened as a flower its petals. This makes it difficult for some of us to decide the moment of our regeneration; only we know that, once darkness, we are now light in the Lord.

Clear Shining after Rain. — We all know something of cloud and rain. If we did not, our lives would be arid as a desert. Rain is necessary to fructify the seeds that lie buried in the soil but clear shining is needed too. Times of joy are needed equally as those of sorrow. The tender grass is the child of rain and sun. Hast thou had tears, thou shalt have smiles! Hast thou had clouds and rain, thou shalt have clear shining!

Neither will I offer burnt offerings . . . of that which doth cost me nothing. 2 Sam. xxiv. 24.

GOD'S love to us *cost Him something*. He spared not his own Son, and that Son spared not his blood. But how little our love to Him costs us! Let us understand that where there is true, strong love to Jesus, it will cost us something. Love is the costliest of all undertakings.

It will cost us *Self-denial*. Christ and self are perfectly incompatible; to have the one we must be prepared to surrender the other. The heart subtly schemes to hold both; but it does not deceive Christ. He knows in a moment when we have preferred to spare ourselves and to sacrifice Him, or to obey Him and sacrifice ourselves. We know it also. At first we may find it an effort to count all things but loss for Him; but as we go on doing it, and drink in the fresh air that breathes about the mountains of self-denial — above all, as we see the smile of pleasure on his face — our hearts leap with joy, and we love to give Him everything, not thinking of the cost, any more than Mary did when she broke the alabaster box of very precious ointment. After all, it is but fitting that we offer our bodies "a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God."

It will cost us *Companionships*. Those who knew us will pass us with averted faces. It will cost us *hard-earned money*; for we shall realize that we have no property in anything that we possess. It will cost us *high repute* amongst our fellows. But what shall we mind if we gain Christ? You cannot give up for Him without regaining everything you have renounced, but purified and transfigured. Did not the Lord say so? And did He not add *a hundredfold, with persecution*. Let us heartily respond, "Lord, Thou knowest all things: Thou knowest that I love Thee! "

As the Lord liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress. [1 Kings i. 29.](#)

"IN my distress I called on the Lord, and cried to my God." Never let there be distress without its cry. He will hear your voice out of his temple, and your cry will come before Him even into his ears. He will answer, and set you in a large place. There is even a gain to be won from distress, because it brings out new phases of Christ's redemptive help.

God redeemed David from *the calumny of those who maligned him* without cause. In so many of his psalms he refers to the unjust and cruel hatred which misrepresented him and his doings. But God, to whom he committed his cause, vindicated him, so that his righteousness shone as the light, and his judgment as the noonday. So He will do for you. Those who now lay all manner of unkind charges to your door, will be compelled to admit your innocence. Only leave your cause with God, and be still.

God redeemed David from all *the afflictions that shadowed his early days*: from his wanderings in the wilderness; from his hairbreadth escapes in the eaves; from meeting his death on many a terrible battlefield. We hardly realize, just now, how much we owe to the Angel of God's redemption, who is ever beside us, environing us with careful love, so that no evil may approach us, or snare take our feet. Our pathway is thick with shares and dangers, as the pilgrims found it when journeying through the valley of the shadow; but there is a way out, and in the morning we shall marvel to see how we escaped.

God redeemed David's *life from destruction*. This was the greatest miracle of all, when we consider the strong passions that slumbered within him, breaking out whenever he broke loose from God's grace.

That the Lord may continue his word. [1 Kings ii. 4.](#)

HOW strongly David held to God's promise! It was deeply graven in his soul. How could he forget the word which guaranteed the succession of his race upon the throne of Israel! At the same time he distinctly recognised that the fulfilment was conditional. There was an *if* in it. It was only in so far as his children took heed to walk before God in truth that God was bound to place them on the throne of Israel; therefore he urged Solomon to keep the charge of the Lord, that the Lord might continue his word. We also must obey the threefold condition if we would enjoy a continuance of God's helpful care.

1. *Be thou strong.* — The strength which is in Jesus Christ waits to make us strong. In the Lion of the tribe of Judah there is the boldness which will not swerve in the face of the foe. Timid women and little children in the days of persecution have waxed valiant in the fight, and have not flinched from death, because Jesus was beside them.

2. *Keep the charge of the Lord thy God.* — He has committed to our care many a sacred deposit, in return for our deposit with Him ([2 Tim. i. 12, 14](#); R.V., *marg.*). They are his holy Gospel, the Rest Day, the doctrines of the Evangelical Faith, and the Inspired Word. Let us watch them until we see them weighed out in the temple as were the sacred vessels which Ezra committed to the priests for transport across the desert ([Ezra viii. 33](#)).

3. *Keep his statutes and commandments.* — We must obey with reverent care the one great law of love, which includes all the rest. Acting thus, we shall put ourselves in the way of enjoying a continuance of that favour which God has promised.

I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked. [1 Kings iii. 13.](#)

THE understanding heart was Solomon's supreme request, and it was given him before the morning light had broken over Jerusalem. But God did exceeding abundantly beyond what he asked or thought. Riches and honour, victory and long life, were thrown in as part of the Divine gift; as paper and string are given by the tradesmen with the goods we purchase. It seems as though our Lord's words were anticipated, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

Put first things first. — One of the most important lessons of life is to discern the relative value of the

objects within our reach. The child will take the handful of glass beads, and leave the heap of diamonds in the rough. It is the terrible mistake of men that, perplexed by earth's cross-lights, they put evil for good and good for evil; they make earth rather than heaven their centre; time rather than eternity their measurement.

Seek God and all things in Him. — Things without God cannot satisfy the craving of the soul. To know God, and to be known by Him, is to possess all things. All that is lovely, strong, or right, in any human being was in the Creator before it entered the creature; having God, you possess all things in Him.

Be more careful of what you are than what you have. — A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things that he possesseth; but in his purity, truth, tenderness, and the properties of his soul. The fruit of the Spirit must ever be manifest in the life of the believer — "Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance."

Largeness of heart. [1 Kings iv. 29.](#)

WE must all admit that our soul is too narrow. It holds too little, knows too little, is deficient in willpower, and, above all, in capacity of love; and when we are called to run in the way of God's commandments, we break down in despair, and cry, "If I am to be a runner, Thou must first enlarge my heart."

How little we know of the experience which Madame Guyon describes when she says: "This vastness or enlargedness, which is not bounded by anything, increases every day; so that my soul in partaking of the qualities of her Spouse seems also to partake of his immensity."

"There is," remarks one of the old Puritans, "a straitness, slavery, and narrowness, in all sin; sin crumples up our souls; which, if they were freely spread abroad, would be as large and wide as the whole universe. No man is truly free; but he that hath his will enlarged to the extent of God's will, by loving whatsoever God loves, and nothing else, he enjoys boundless liberty, and a boundless sweetness." God's love embraces the universe. He "so loved the world that He gave his only-begotten Son." We who have partaken of the Divine nature must also love as He does.

Thomas a Kempis says, finally: "He who desires glory in things outside of God, or to take pleasure in some private good, shall many ways be encumbered and straitened; but if heavenly grace enter in, and true charity, there will be no envy, neither narrowness of heart, neither will self-love busy itself, for Divine charity overcometh all things, and enlargeth all the powers of the soul." Give unto us, God, this largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea-shore I

Now the Lord my God hath given me rest on every side. [1 Kings v. 4.](#)

GOD is the Rest-Giver, When He surrounds us on every side with his protecting care, so that our life resembles one of the cities of the Netherlands in the great war — inaccessible to the foe because surrounded by the waters of the sea, admitted through the sluice — then neither adversary nor evil occurrent can break in, and we are kept in perfect peace, our minds being stayed on God.

"Hidden in the hollow of his blessed hand,
Never foe can enter, never traitor stand.

Have you experienced the rest which comes by putting God round about you, on every side — like the light which burns brightly on a windy night because surrounded by its four panes of clear glass! Ah! what a contrast between the third and fourth verse: Wars on every side; Rest on every side. And yet the two are compatible, because the wars expend themselves on God, as the waves on the shingle; and there are far reaches of rest within, like orchards and meadows and pasture-lands beyond the reach of the devastating water.

Out of such rest should come the best work. We are not surprised to find Solomon announcing his purpose to build a house unto the name of the Lord. Mary, who sat at the feet of Jesus, anointed Him. Out of quiet hearts arise the greatest resolves; just as from the seclusion of country hamlets have come the greatest warriors, statesmen, and patriots. Men think, foolishly, that the active, ever-moving souls are the strongest. It is not so, however. They expend themselves before the day of trial comes. Give me those who have the power to restrain themselves and wait; these are they that can act with the greatest momentum in the hour of crisis.

There was neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron heard. [1 Kings vi. 7.](#)

IN absolute silence, like the growth of a palm in the desert, that noble building arose in the symmetry of its fair proportions. But there was plenty of quarrying and hammering and chiselling before the materials were brought to the site.

The absolute silence with which the Temple rose is a meet emblem of the progress of the Church, from its foundations laid in the Apostolate towards the top stone, which before very long will be laid upon the completed structure. Amid the rise and fall of dynasties and empires, the Church is being built. Soul after soul, as so many added bricks, is being quietly placed upon the walls. Some day the world will be amazed when it sees the New Jerusalem descend out of heaven from God. The mightiest works of God are the fruit of silence.

You and I are now in the quarry, hewn, chipped, chiselled: or we are in the saw-pit, being sawn, planed, pierced by nails. Be of good cheer! It will not be long, the preparatory work will be over, and we shall become part of the eternal structure. Into heaven there can enter neither hammer, nor axe, nor any tool of iron. The trial will have done its work. Sorrow and crying will flee away. The apostle Paul, who knew more than any man what trial and pain meant, could confidently declare: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Then shall the city of God shine forth in completed beauty, her walls Salvation and her gates Praise; and the triumphant song of the redeemed shall ring forth: "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

In the plain of Jordan did the king cast them. [1 Kings vii. 46.](#)

THE Apostle tells us to obey from the heart that mould or form of doctrine to which we were delivered ([Rom. vi. 17](#)). What a mould is to the metal which is wrought into various forms of utensils, that the form of sound doctrine is to believers who desire to resemble Christ. When our hearts, melted in contrition and penitence, are poured into the teaching of the Apostles, to ponder it in memory, and to carry it out in life, they are, so to speak, cast into the pattern of Jesus Christ, which they wear for evermore. Thus we are conformed to the image of his Son.

We differ as widely as the vessels named here. Some are lavers, and some bases; some shovels, and some basons. It matters little what shape we bear; so long as we are cleansed and meet for the Master's use. Each vessel in Solomon's temple filled its own niche. The machinery of the whole would have been hindered if one had been missing. Be content with the shape which the Great Designer hath intended for thee. Yield to it. Dare to pour thyself into the dark passages of the mould. Do not ask the intention of this or that. Obey from the heart, otherwise thou mayest have to be broken up, and put back again into the furnace to go through the process once more. This is the Plain of the Jordan for us, the place of death; but soon we shall be remitted to the Palace and Temple of God.

There is no clue to the understanding of the mysteries of our mortal life, save the hypothesis, that we are being prepared for the position which has been prepared for us in the eternal world. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God."

That he maintain the cause of his servant, as every day shall require. [1 Kings viii. 59](#) (R.V.).

THE marginal (R. V.) reading is, "The thing of a day in its day." What rest would come into our lives, if we really believed that God maintained the cause of his servants! Men hate you, and say unkind or untrue things about you; on your part, though you are quite prepared to admit that you have made mistakes, yet you know that you desire above all things to act as God's servant should, that your motives are sincere, and your hands clean — be of good courage then: God will maintain your cause, as every day may require.

Or, you are beset by strong competition; and, in order to hold your own, you have been tempted to do what is not perfectly the best — to spice your teaching with a little heterodoxy, puff your wares with misleading titles, to adulterate your goods. But there is no need to do this; if only you are faithful to God, He will maintain your cause, as every day may require.

Or, you are tempted almost beyond endurance, and think that you must yield. The seductions are so insidious, the pitfalls so carefully concealed, the charm of evil so subtle. But, if you will only look away to God, you will find Him a very present help to maintain your cause. Oh, trust Him; for none of them that do so can be desolate. Daily strength for daily need; daily manna for daily hunger; daily maintenance for daily temptation. These are assured.

As we stand on the hill-top in the morning and look across the valley of the coming day, its scenes are too closely veiled in heavy-hanging mists for us to specify all our requests. We can breathe the comprehensive petition, "Give us this day our daily bread." And God will suit his help to each requirement. As the moment arrives "the thing" will be there.

I have hallowed this house which thou hast built. [1 Kings ix. 3.](#)

MAN builds; God hallows. This co-operation between man and God pervades all life. Man performs the outward and mechanical; God the inward and spiritual. Paul plants, Apollos waters; but God gives the increase. We elaborate our sermons and addresses, building them up with careful, eager thought; but God must work in and through them for his own glory in the salvation and upbuilding of souls. We must be careful to do our part with reverence and godly fear, remembering that God must work in realms we cannot touch, and to issues we cannot reach, before our poor exertions can avail.

May we not apply this especially to the education of a child's life? Many who read these lines are engaged in building structures which will outlive the Pyramids. The body is only the scaffolding, behind and through which the building of the soul is being upreared. The materials with which we build may be the gold, silver, and precious stones, of our example, precept, careful watching, and discipline; but God must come in to hallow. Our strenuous endeavour must be supplemented by the incoming of the Holy Spirit.

God hallows by his indwelling. Holiness is the result of his putting his Name into a place, a day, a human soul; for his Name is his nature, Himself. Each day may be a building, reared between sunrise and sunset, with our activities; but it were vain to hope to realize our ideal unless the structure become a Temple filled with God. Build what you will; but never be satisfied unless God sets his eyes and heart upon your life, hallowing and sanctifying each day and act to Himself.

Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee. [1 Kings x. 9.](#)

THERE were two reasons why Solomon was on the throne. First, because of God's love to him; secondly, because of God's love to Israel. May we not address our Saviour with similar expressions of gladness as those which the queen addressed to a less than He?

How well it is, now and again, to let ourselves go in exuberant adoration! Prayer is good, but it may revolve too largely about our own needs and desires: thanks are right, when we have received great benefits at his hands; but praise is best, because the heart forgets itself and earth and time, in enlarged conceptions of its adorable Lover and Saviour.

We are reminded in this connection of a noble hymn by old John Ryland: —

"Thou Son of God, and Son of Man,
Beloved, adored Emmanuel,
Who didst, before all time began,
in glory with thy Father dwell:
"We sing thy love, who didst in time,
For us, humanity assume,
To answer for the sinner's crime,
To suffer in the sinner's room.
"The ransomed Church thy glory sings,
The hosts of heaven thy will obey;
And, Lord of lords, and King of kings,
We celebrate thy blessed away."

We can never praise Him enough. Our furthest thoughts fall short of the reality. His wisdom and prosperity exceed his fame. No question He cannot answer; no desire He cannot gratify; no munificence He cannot excel. Happy are they who stand continually before Him. Let us see that this is our happy privilege; not content to pay Him a transient visit, returning to our own land, but communing with Him always of that which is in our heart.

His wives turned away his heart. [1 Kings xi. 4.](#)

EVERY man is vulnerable at one point of his character. Strong everywhere else, and armour-plated, he is weak there; and our great enemy knows just where to strike home. It would have been useless to argue with Solomon for the claims of idols. He could at once, by his wisdom, have annihilated all infidel arguments, and have established the existence and unity of God. But, step by step, he was led by silken cords, a captive, to the worship of other gods. It is a solemn warning; and Nehemiah was perfectly justified when, in his contention with the Jews who had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab, he said, "Did not Solomon, king of Israel, sin by these things! Yet among many nations there was no king like him who was beloved of his God. "

Let young people beware where they let their hearts go forth in love. Whom we love we resemble; and in the marriage tie it is almost inevitable that seductions to the lower will overcome the drawings to the higher. When a Christian disobeys God's distinct command against intermarriage with the ungodly, he begins to sink to the level of his ungodly partner whom he had thought to raise to his own religious standing.

Our associates determine the drift and current of our life. It is so easy to launch upon the current that flows past our feet; it seems impossible that the laughing, enticing water should ever carry us against sharp, splintering rocks, or over breaking cataracts. When we are compelled to associate with the ungodly, let us maintain a strict self-watch, and pray that the breath of the heavenward gale may more than counteract the tendency of the earthward current.

The month which he had devised of his own heart. [1 Kings xii. 33.](#)

JEROBOAM acted on expediency. It did seem reasonable to argue that the constant going up to Jerusalem to worship might alienate the people from his throne, and awaken a desire for the old national unity; and without doubt a mere worldly wisdom extolled his setting-up of idol-gods at Bethel and Dan; but his policy in this respect led to the downfall of his kingdom. Had he trusted God's promise, made through the prophet Ahijah, the Divine purpose would have ensured the continuance of his rule; but the prompting of expediency resulted in ultimate disaster (ch. xiv).

How prone we all are to devise out of our own hearts! We take counsel with ourselves, and do what seems prudent and far-seeing, with the inevitable result of being betrayed into courses of action that God cannot approve, and of which we have reason to repent bitterly. It is infinitely better to wait on God till He develop his plan, as He most certainly will, when the predestined hour strikes. He who trusts in his own heart, and takes his own way, is a fool. To run before God is to sink knee-deep into the swamp. We must make all things after the pattern shown us on the Mount, and take our time from God's almanack. What a contrast to the course of Jeroboam was that of the Son of man! He would do nothing of Himself. His eye was always on His Father's dial-plate, and thus He knew when his time was not yet fulfilled. He was always consulting the movement of his Father's will, and did only those things which He saw his Father doing. Similarly make God's will and way thy Pole-star. Oh to be able to say with our blessed Lord, "I seek not mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me "!

Forasmuch as thou hast been disobedient, . . . but camest back. [1 Kings xiii. 21, 22](#) (R.V.).

WE are inclined at first sight to pity this unknown prophet, and to justify his return; but as we look closer into the story, we not only discover the reason for the severe penalty that overtook him, but we are warned lest we make a similar mistake. When we have received a direct command fresh from the lips of Christ, we must act on it, and not be turned aside by a different suggestion, made to us through the lips of professing Christians. God does not vacillate or alter in the thing which proceeds from his mouth. When we know we are in the line of his purpose, we must not allow ourselves to be diverted by any appeal or threat, from whomsoever it may emanate. Deal with God at first-hand.

The rule for determining the true worth of the advice which our friends proffer us, is to ask, first, whether it conflicts with our own deep-seated conviction of God's will; and, secondly, whether it tends to the ease and satisfaction of the flesh, as the old prophet's suggestion certainly did. Beware of any one who allures you with the bread and water that are to break your fast. That bait is likely enough to disturb the balance of your judgment. When a voice says spare thyself, be on the alert; it savours the things that be of man, not of those that be of God.

Learn to deal with God at first-hand. Do not run hither and thither to human teachers, or to the Church. Be still before God, and what He says in the depths of thy soul, do. His Holy Spirit shall guide you into all truth; and when once his way has been revealed to thee, go straight on, listening to no other voice, however much it professes Divine inspiration.

I am sent to thee with heavy tidings. 1 Kings xiv. 5.

HOW foolish! Jeroboam thought that the old prophet could penetrate the veil that hid the future, but not the disguise in which his wife wished to conceal herself. As we might have expected, the aged prophet's inner sight read her heart. From God no secrets are hid. Immediately on his accosting her by her name there came the dread announcement of inevitable disaster.

We must not hesitate to unfold all the consequences of sin. As watchmen on the walls, we are bound to tell men of the certain fearful looking for of fiery indignation which shall devour the transgressors. None of us should flinch from declaring the whole counsel of God. We should specially insist on the *guilt side* of sin. Not only that it is a misfortune, a mistake, an error, a disease, a tyranny; but a crime. The sinner is a criminal, who has incurred the just wrath and anger of a holy God: for which he must suffer a due recompense.

Oh for more tenderness that we may with tears warn men of their doom! We are so self-possessed, so stolid; we need to ask that our eyes, like Jeremiah's, should be fountains of tears, that we might weep day and night. If the tidings are heavy, let us first feel their pressure on our own hearts; let us bend over the regions of despair and darkness, and hear the bitter weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and come back to warn our brethren, lest they also come to that place of torment. Though it was with fear and much trembling that Paul preached the Gospel, yet he did not shun to declare the whole counsel of God. And while we go to men with the good tidings of salvation, we must not withhold the heavy tidings from those who persist in unbelief

Asa did . . . right in the eyes of the Lord, as did David his father. [1 Kings xv. 11.](#)

IT is a great thing to have such a testimony as this. We may do right in our own eyes; yet the eye of the Lord may detect evil which neither our associates nor we have seen. We may deceive ourselves, we may deceive others; but we cannot deceive God. In the home or business, in situation or factory, let us live as under the searching gaze of God.

Asa's life was one of religious activity: he destroyed the idols of his father, and even deposed his queen-mother, "because she made an idol in a grove." It needs Divine courage so to live for God that at home or afield men shall take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus. This is what the world is languishing for — *reality*, consistency under all circumstances, and before all men.

There are, however, two clouds overhanging this otherwise bright life. "The high places were not removed" (14). Though idols were destroyed, the groves in which they were erected remained. They were no snare to him; and he took care that during his life they should not ensnare others; but after his death, in the reign of Jehoshaphat his son, "the people offered and burnt incense" in them (xxii. 43). We must not only cleanse our way before the Lord, but remove any evil thing which may cause others to stumble.

The other cloud is indicated in [2 Chron. xvi. 12](#): "He was diseased in his feet. . . Yet in his disease he sought not to the Lord, but to the physicians." Strange that in affliction he should not have turned to the Great Physician. The enemy of souls is ever on the watch. Pray that amid the pains of death you may not act unworthily.

Ahab did more to provoke the Lord to anger than all the kings. [1 Kings xvi. 33.](#)

HIS sin was very aggravated, largely through the influence of Jezebel, his young and beautiful wife, who introduced the abominations of Phoenician idol-worship. This is why he is said to have exceeded his predecessors in wickedness. *They* broke the second commandment, and worshipped Jehovah under the form of a calf. *Ahab and Jezebel* broke the first, and chose other gods — Baal, the sun, and Ashtoreth, the moon. The inveterate love for this idolatry was connected with licentious rites with which these deities were served. What wonder that the land became corrupt when the fountains of its religious life were polluted at the source?

The connection between the indulgence of impurity and the declension of the spiritual life, is very close. As the apostle Paul tells us in [Romans i.](#), the men that refuse to retain God in their knowledge are given up to the working of passion; and as they yield to passion they lose the sweet, clear impression of the truth and nearness of the Christ. The first, second, and third thing to be said to young people on venturing out into the world, corrupt through many deceitful lusts, is, Be pure. Wear the white flower of a blameless life. If you cannot be faultless, be blameless. If you cannot realize all the good you know, at least refrain from all the evil. Keep your robes unspotted from the world. Then through purity of heart and obedience in life, you shall see God. As the living Christ enters the heart, He will drive before Him the brute forms of evil, overthrow the tables of the money-changers, and will sit to teach of God. Give yourself unreservedly into his keeping, that He may govern and control every avenue of your life.

I have commanded the ravens . . . a widow women . . . there. [1 Kings xvii. 4, 9.](#)

WE must be where God desires. — Elijah spoke of himself as always standing before the Lord God of Israel. He deemed himself as much a courtier in the royal palace as Gabriel ([Luke i. 19](#)). And he could as distinctly stand before God when hiding beside Cherith, or sheltering in the widow's house at Zarephath, as when he stood erect on Carmel, or listened to the voice of God at Horeb. Wherever you go, and whatever ministry you are called to undertake, glory in this, that you never go to any greater distance from God.

If we are where God wants us to be, *He will see to the supply of our need.* It is as easy for Him to feed us by the ravens as by the widow woman. As long as God says, Stay here, or there, be sure that He is pledged to provide for you. Though you resemble a lonely sentinel in some distant post of missionary service, God will see to you. The ravens are not less amenable to his command than of old: and out of the stores of widow women He is as able to supply your need as He did Elijah's, at Zarephath.

How often *God teaches best in seclusion and solitude!* It is by the murmuring brooks of nature that we have our deepest lessons. It is in the homes of the poor that we are fitted for our greatest tasks. It is beside couches where children suffer and die, that we receive those preparations of the heart which avail us when the bugle note summons us to some difficult post.

God leads through death to life. — It was needful that the child should die, that sin might be remembered and dealt with; but through Death's portal the trio entered a richer, fuller life. Fear not that gateway!

So Ahab went up to eat and drink. And Elijah went up to the top of Carmel. [1 Kings xviii. 42.](#)

SUCH differences obtain still. The children of this world and the children of light are manifest. What though the bodies of four hundred and fifty prophets lay slain in the gorge of the Kishon; or that by one great act Elijah had hewn down the upas tree, the deadly influence of which had corrupted Palestine; or that the long-expected rain was in the air — yet Ahab must eat and drink. These are the things which the children of the world seek after. Watch and pray, lest you enter into this temptation. Let appetite be kept well in hand — your servant, not your master; and see to it that you are capable of such profound and absorbing interest in the things of the Kingdom of God, as to count the gratification of physical desire unworthy to be compared with the high delights of service, prayer, and communion with the unseen.

Though he must have been exhausted with the excitements and efforts of the day, Elijah must spend the evening hour with God. Though he knew that the rain was near, he felt that his prayers were a needful condition for its bestowment. Though any part of Carmel might have become his oratory, he sought the lonely solitudes of the summit with the outspread sea before him, that his soul might hold undisturbed vigil, and that he might see over the wide expanse of the ocean the first tokens of the coming answer. His attitude denoted his humility. His repeated injunction to the lad, his perseverance. His success approved his faith.

Stand, suppliant soul, on the highest point of expectant hope; see the hurrying answer, which was being prepared from pools and lakes and seas, long ere thy prayer began. "Before they call, I will answer."

Behold, an angel touched him. [1 Kings xix. 5.](#)

IN all probability the angels often touch us when danger is near, threatening our health and life, or when foul fiends step up to us with hideous temptation. They find us out, especially when, like Elijah, we are alone and depressed; when nervous depression has crept about our hearts; when we seem to have failed in the conflict against evil, and long for death to end our long and weary strife. It was the lament of a holy soul on the verge of eternity, that he had made so little of the ministry of God's holy and tender angels.

It was very gracious for God to deal thus with his servant. We might have expected rebuke or remonstrance, chiding or chastisement; but we would hardly have expected such loving, gentle treatment as this. Is this the man who defied Ahab and all his priests? He is as frail and impotent as any! Nay, but God looked beneath the surface depression, and detected the strong fountains of courage and devotion that lay beneath, only capable of being called again into intense manifestation. He knew his servant's frame, and recognised that he was dust. He knew how to distinguish between the passing overstrain of the body and the heroic temper of the spirit. So, he understands us in our fits of depression and despair.

Whenever these angel-fingers touch you, whether directly or through the medium of loving mortal hands, you will always find the cake and the cruse of water. God never awakens to disappoint. It is an infinite pleasure to Him to awaken his loved ones to good things, which they had neither asked nor thought. Will not dying be something like this? The angel of life will touch us, and we shall awake to see what love has prepared.

As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. [1 Kings xx. 40.](#)

THIS was likely enough to happen on a battlefield. It would not be possible to hold your prisoner, and to busy yourself about other things at the same time. This man, in the prophet's parable, made a great mistake to concern himself about a number of trifles, when so serious a matter as his own life depended on giving all his attention to the custodianship of the prisoner entrusted to his care. But is it not thus that men miss the main end of life?

Busy here and there, and life is gone. — Many spend their days in mere trivialities. Like children they dig in the sand; like the butterfly, they flit from flower to flower. A round of visits, a few novels, a good many hours of light gaiety; vanity, fashion, and amusement — these fill their hours, the days flash by, and life is gone. They have nothing to show for it.

Busy here and there, and the chance of saving others is gone. — Lives touch lives, for the chief purpose that one should influence the other. But too often we deal only with superficialities, busying ourselves in the slightest interests, but not seeking the salvation of those with whom we associate. The dance, the game, the business relationship, monopolise our thought, and our friends are swept from us in the eddying whirl of life's battle, and are gone.

Busy here and there, and the knowledge of God is gone. — Remember how the birds caught away the seed of the Kingdom; and be sure that, in the same way, the cares and riches of this world, and the lusts of other things may enter in, and destroy the impression made on the heart. The ephemeral interests of life press hard on its real interests. Like boys, we squander in trifling the hours given to prepare for an examination on which all the future must turn.

And Ahab said to Elijah, hast thou found me, O mine enemy? [1 Kings xxi. 20.](#)

AHAB got his garden of herbs, but he had Elijah withal, who stood at the gate like an incarnate conscience. Men may get the prize on which they have set their heart; but if they have obtained it wrongfully, the conscience of the wrong done will haunt them, and take away the pleasure on which they counted, and ultimately bring them like a quarry to the ground.

We turn our best friends into enemies, as Ahab did Elijah. The cloud that lights Israel is darkness to Pharaoh; the angel that protects Jerusalem, slays the host of Sennacherib; the gentle love which anoints the Saviour, instigates in Judas a jealousy which ends in murder. The God who shows Himself merciful to the merciful is froward to the froward. The cause of the alteration is to be sought within ourselves. The sun that melts wax hardens clay, but the difference is in the clay. To the widow of Zarephath Elijah was an angel of light; whilst to Ahab he was an enemy. The difference lay in their hearts; the one being holy and loving, the other dark and turbid. What you are, determines whether Elijah will be your friend or your enemy.

This word "sold thyself" is very awful. It underlies Goethe's tragedy of Faust, in which the soul sells itself to the devil for so many years of worldly pleasure. A few promises which are never kept; a mirage that is dissipated in thin air when we approach it; a bribe of gold or silver that burns the hands which receive it — such are the price for which men sell themselves. "They sell themselves for nought." Truly the devil drives a hard bargain. When he gets the soul into his power, he laughs at his former promises, and pays as wages, *death*.

A certain man . . . smote the king of Israel between the joints of the harness. [1 Kings xxii. 34.](#)

EVERY man we meet is clothed in armour; in other words, we all cover ourselves with plates on which to receive the thrust of accusation and reproach. "I only do as others." "I do not see any special harm in it." "My father did it before me." "I cannot help it." Such are some of the plates in the armour of the soul; and our work as Christian workers becomes abortive in so many instances, because we are content to belabour the plates, instead of striking home to the one place where the armour joints are. Successful soul-winning depends on discovering the vulnerable part of a man, and striking there. But all this demands a very special discernment of spirits, and anointing of the Holy Ghost. Only so can we detect where best to bring about conviction, and make men know their need of the Gospel of God's grace. The great need of the present day is a sharper and more searching analysis of sin. Men need to be shown how they are violating the laws of God. They assent generally to the Scriptural statements of what God requires, but fail to realize how greatly *they* have come short. You are almost sure to hit, if you begin to show the various ways in which respectably-living people are coming under the Divine sentence.

But several conditions must be fulfilled. (1) *Study well your own heart.* (2) *Be a deep student of the biographies of Scripture;* because every type of human character is delineated in Holy Writ. (3) *Open your heart to the Holy Ghost,* through whom alone you can discern spirits. He is a discerner of the thoughts of the heart, and will teach you to cut to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow.

Thou man of God! [2 Kings i. 9, 11, 13.](#)

OH that thou and I might so live before God and men, that they should recognise us as men of God, as God's men! See how these ungodly captains at once recognised this, in the case of Elijah. They fretted and chafed against his holiness; but they were forced to admit it. They tried to impose their orders, or those of their king; but they realized that Elijah was the servant of Him whom they set at nought, so far as their own lives were concerned.

If we are really men of God, we shall be the last to assume the title. Notice that Elijah puts an *if* before the title with which he was saluted: "*If* I be a man of God." Paul counted himself the least of all saints.

We must be of God. — All our goodness must originate in Him. We can no more boast of goodness than a chamber can boast of the light which irradiates each corner of its space. The faith that takes his grace, as well as the grace it takes, is his. We are absolutely his debtors; and happy are they who love to have it so, and lie always at the Beautiful Gate of God's heart, expecting to receive alms at his hand.

We must be for God. — This is the only cure for self-consciousness, for that perpetual obtrusion of the self-life which is our bane and curse. Ask that the Holy Spirit may fill you with so absorbing a passion for the glory of Jesus, that there may be no room to think of your own reputation or emolument.

We must be in God, and God in us. — This is possible, when we love perfectly. He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. Oh, sea of light, may we lie spread out in thy translucent waves, as the sponges in southern sapphire seas, till every fibre of our being be permeated and infilled!

Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee. [2 Kings ii. 2, 4, 6.](#)

THRICE Elijah spoke thus to his friend and disciple, to test him. Perseverance, tenacity of purpose, a refusal to be content with anything short of the best, are indispensable conditions for the attainment of the highest possibilities of experience and service. And perpetually in our life's discipline these words come back on us, Tarry here! Not that God desires us to tarry, but because He desires each onward step to be the choice and act of our own will.

Tarry here in Consecration. — "You have given so much; is it not time that you refrained from further sacrifices? Ungird your loins, sit down and rest, forbear from this strenuous following after. Spare thyself; this shall not come to thee."

Tarry here in the Life of Prayer. — "It is waste time to spend so much time at the footstool of God. You have done more than most, desist from further intercession and supplication."

Tarry here in the attainment of the likeness of Christ. — "It will cost you so much, if all that is not Christ-like is to pass away from your life."

Such voices are perpetually speaking to us all. And if we heed them, we are at once shut out of that crossing the Jordan, that rapturous intercourse with heaven, that reception of the double portion of the Spirit, which await those who have successfully stood the test. The law of the Christian life is always Advance; always leaving that which is behind; always reckoning that you have not attained; always following on to know the Lord, growing in grace and in the knowledge of the blessed Saviour, and saying to the Spirit of God, as Elisha to Elijah, *I will not leave thee.*

Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled. [2 Kings iii. 17.](#)

THIS is God's way of fulfilling the desire of them that fear Him. We like to see the clouds blown forward through the sky, and hear the moan of the rising wind; in other words, we like to see God's gifts on their way, or to have the sensible emotion of receiving them. Sometimes we have symptoms and signs that fill us with rapture; at other times, these are lacking, and we surrender ourselves to despair. Yet when we see neither wind nor rain, God may be most mightily at work.

It is so in Church work. — How often we make our valleys full of ditches! Our machinery is complicated and perfect; we have spared neither pains nor care. Then we ardently desire the signs of a powerful revival, and break our hearts if they are not apparent; while, all the time, if we only knew it, the Divine blessing is welling up in the ditches, doing more than would be the case if our highest wishes were gratified. Here and there tears are falling silently, hearts are being cleansed, lives are becoming yielded to God.

It is so in Christian experience. — We expect to have our Pentecost as the early Church received hers. We desire to see wind and rain, and to know that God is baptizing us; but this is not granted. There is no footfall of hurrying clouds, no coronet of flame, no gift of tongues. But, deep down, the ditches are being filled up, yearnings are being satisfied, the capacity for God within us is being met, though it grows apace. God be praised that the success of his work is not gauged by outward signs!

A well may be filled as completely by the percolation of water, a drop at a time, as by turning a river into it.

And the oil stayed. [2 Kings iv. 6.](#)

WHAT a sorrowful confession! There was no reason why it should stay. There was as much oil as ever, and the power which had made so much could have gone on without limit or exhaustion. The only reason for the ceasing of the oil was in the failure of the vessels. The widow and her sons had secured only a limited number of vessels, and therefore there was only a limited supply of the precious oil.

This is why so many of God's promises are unfulfilled in your experience. — In former days you kept claiming their fulfilment; frequently you brought God's promises to Him and said, "Do as Thou hast said." Vessel after vessel of need was brought empty and taken away full. But of late years you have refrained, you have rested on your oars, you have ceased to bring the vessels of your need. Hence the dwindling supply.

This is why your life is not so productive of blessing as it might be. — You do not bring vessels enough. You think that God has wrought as much through you as He can or will. You do not expect Him to fill the latter years of your life as He did the former. You can trust Him for two sermons a week, but not for five or six.

This is why the blessing of a revival stays in its course. — As long as the missionary remains with us, we call look for the continuance of blessing. But after awhile we say, Let the services stop; they have run their course, and fulfilled their end. And forthwith the blessing stops in mid-flow. Let us go on pleading with the unsaved, and bringing the empty vessels of our poor effort for God to fill them up to the full measure of their capacity.

Like unto the flesh of a little child. [2 Kings v. 14.](#)

IS there any fabric woven on the loom of time to be compared in perfect beauty to the flesh of a little child, on which, as yet, no scar or blemish can be traced? So sweet, so pure, so clean. It was a wonderful combination, that the strong muscles and make of the mighty man of war should blend with the flesh of a child. But this may be ours also, if we will let the hand of Jesus pass over our leprous-smitten souls. At this moment, if you let Him, He will touch you and say, "Be clean," and immediately the leprosy will depart, and you will return to the days of your youth — not forgiven only, but cleansed; not pardoned only, but clad in the beauty of the Lord your God, which He will put on you.

We do not count a little child to be free from the taint of sin. It is conceived in sin, and inherits the evil tendencies of our fallen race. Its innocence of evil is not holiness. Jesus gives us more than innocence, He makes us pure and holy. But there are other childlike qualities which our Saviour gives. The *humility* of a little child, who is unconscious of itself, and who is not perpetually looking for admiration. The *unselfishness* of a little child, who seeks its companion to share its luxuries and games. The *trust* of a little child, which so naturally clings to a strong and loving heart, willing to follow anywhere, to believe in anything. The *love* of a little child, who responds to every endearment with sunny laughter and soft caresses.

There is a great difference between *childish* and *childlike*. The former is put away, as we grow up into Christ: the latter we grow into, as we become more like our Lord. The oldest angels are the youngest: the ripest saints are the most childlike.

Behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. [2 Kings vi. 17.](#)

SO it is with each of God's saints. We cannot see, because of the imperfection of mortal vision, the harnessed squadrons of fire and light; but the Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them. If our eyes were opened, we should see the angel-hosts as an encircling fence of fire; but whether we see them or not, they are certainly there.

God is between us and temptation. — However strong the foe, God is stronger. However swift the descending blow, God is swifter to catch and ward off. However weak we are, through long habits of yielding, God is greater than our hearts, and can keep in perfect peace. "Trust ye in the Lord forever; for in the Lord Jehovah is the Rock of Ages."

God is between us and the hate of man. — Dare to believe that there is an invisible wall of protection between you and all that men devise against you. What though the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing! No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise in judgment shall be condemned.

God is between you and the deluge of care. — What thousands are beset with that dark spectre! They have no rest or peace either day or night, saying, "Where will the next rent, the next meal, come from?" How different the life of birds, and flowers, of children, of Jesus, and all holy souls. Oh, rest in the Lord, and put Him between you and black care.

God is between you and the pursuit of your past. — He is your reward; and as He intercepted the pursuit of Pharaoh, so He stands at Calvary between your past and you. The assayer of retribution is arrested by that Divine Victim — what more can we ask!

This day is a day of good tidings. [2 Kings vii. 9.](#)

IT was indeed. The enemy that had so long hemmed them in had dispersed, leaving a great spoil behind. The famine which had driven the people to awful straits was at an end, and there was now plenty of everything. It was inhuman for these four lepers to be content with eating and drinking, and sharing out the spoil, when hard by a city was in agony. Common humanity bade them give information of what had happened.

Let us take care lest some mischief befall us, if we withhold the blessed Gospel from a dying world. We know that Jesus has died and risen again, and that his unsearchable riches wait for appropriation. We have availed ourselves of the offer; but let us see to it that so far as we can, we are making known that the wine and milk may be obtained without money and without price.

Mischief always overtakes a selfish policy; whereas those who dare to share with others what they have received, not only keep what they have, but find the fragments enough for many days afterwards.

Let us tell men that the Saviour has overcome our foes, and has opened the kingdom of heaven to all who believe. Let us speak from a full heart of all that He has proved to be. Let us invite men to share with us the grace which hath neither shore nor bound.

One ounce of testimony is worth a ton weight of argument, and overpowers all objection. The Lord, on whom the king leaned, derided the possibility of the prophet's prediction; and no doubt had plenty of adherents. But the leper's report swept all his words to the winds. They had known, tasted, and handled. Let us remember that we are called to be witnesses of what God hath done for us.

And the Man of God wept. [2 Kings viii. 11.](#)

ELISHA foresaw all the evil that Hazael would inflict on Israel, and it moved him to tears. Though he was a strong man, able to move kingdoms by his message and prayer, yet he was of a tender and compassionate disposition. This was he who one moment upbraided the king of Israel for his crimes, and the next called for a minstrel to calm his perturbed spirit with strains of music. The men that can move others are themselves very susceptible and easily moved.

The nearer we live to God, the more we deserve to be known as men and women of God, the more will our tears flow for the slain of the daughters of our people. Consider the ravages that drink, and impurity, and gambling, are making among our people; enumerate the homes that are desolate, the young life that is wrecked as it is leaving the harbour, the awful dishonour done to woman; and surely there must come times when tears well up for very humanity's sake, to say nothing of the pity which they acquire who look at things from God's standpoint.

Jesus beheld the city and wept over it. Give us this day, Son of Man, thy compassion, thy love, thy tears, that we may speak of thy grace graciously, of thy love tenderly, and even of thy judgments with brimming, eyes.

"A broken heart, a fount of tears:

Ask, and it shall not be denied.'

Wouldst thou avert such issues; begin with the cradled babes of your homes. Win them for God; teach them how to curb passion and subdue themselves. Tenderness and wisdom may arrest the making of Ben-hadads.

Is it peace, Jehu? And he answered, What peace? [2 Kings ix. 22.](#)

WE all want peace. Of every telegraph messenger, as he puts the buff-coloured envelope into our hands, we ask almost instinctively, Is it peace? If there is a rumour of war, a depression in trade, a bad harvest, a sudden calamity in our neighbourhood, we instantly consider the effect it may have on the tranquillity and prosperity of our life.

By peace we too often mean the absence of the disagreeable, the unbroken routine of outward prosperity, the serene passage of the years: not always eager for anything deeper. And if other and profounder questions intrude themselves, we instantly stifle or evade them. Like Herod, we shut up the Baptist in the dungeon. Like the Roman general, we make a desert and call it peace. Men will flee from a Gospel ministry which pursues them into close quarters, and arouses unwelcome questions that break the peace.

There cannot be true peace so long as we permit the infidelities and charms of some Jezebel of the soul-life to attract and affect us. Jezebel may stand for the painted world, with its wiles and snares, or for the flesh, or for some unholy association of the past life, like that which clung to Augustine. But there must be no quarter given to the unhallowed rival of our Lord. Whatever its charms, it must be flung out of the window before we can be at peace.

"Then, and not till then, we shall see Thee as Thou art;

Then, and not till then, in thy glory bear a part;

Then, and not till then, Thou wilt satisfy each heart."

If you are entirely surrendered to the Lord, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel . [2 Kings x. 31.](#)

JEHU was the Cromwell of his time. He swept away the symbols of idolatry with ruthless destruction. Nothing could withstand his iconoclastic enthusiasm. But he failed to keep his own heart, and therefore his dynasty lasted for but one generation. It is a deep lesson for us all.

We may keep other people's vineyards, and neglect our own. We may give good advice to our friends, but into the very faults against which we warn them. We may pose as infallible guides, but fall into the crevasses and precipices from which we had carefully warned our companions. Jehu avenged the idolatries of Ahab, but he departed not from Jeroboam's calves.

Before you rebuke another, be sure that you are free from the faults that you detect in him. When you hear of the failings of some erring brother, ask yourself whether you are perfectly free from them. And never attempt to cast out the mote from your neighbour's eye till you are sure that the beam has been taken from your own.

Take heed to your heart. Its complexion colours all the issues of life. Do not be content to be strong against evil; be eagerly ambitious of good. It is easier to be vehement against the abominations of others than to judge and put away your own secret sins. But while we keep our heart with all diligence, we cannot afford to be independent of the keeping power of God. We must yield ourselves to Him, reserving nothing. The King must have all. The light of his face must fill every nook and corner of the soul. And every power that opposes itself to his dominion, must be dragged beyond the barriers and ruthlessly slain.

They made him king, and anointed him. [2 Kings xi. 12.](#)

THIS dexterous overthrow of Athaliah by the bringing of the youthful king, who had been hidden in the secret chambers of the Temple, accommodates itself so obviously to a reference to the inner life, that we must be pardoned for making it.

Is not the spiritual condition of too many children of God represented by the condition of the Temple, during the early years of the life of Joash? The king was within its precincts, the rightful heir of the crown and defender of the worship of Jehovah: but, as a matter of fact, the crown was on the head of the usurper Athaliah, who was exercising a cruel and sanguinary tyranny. The king was limited to a chamber, and the majority of the priests, with all the people, had not even heard of his existence. So, unless we are reprobates, Jesus is within the spirit, which has been regenerated by the Holy Ghost; but in too many cases He is limited to a very small corner of our nature, and exercises but a limited power over our life.

There needs to be an anointing, an enthroning, a determination that He shall exercise his power over the entire Temple of our Being; the *spirit*, which stands for the Holy of Holies; the *soul*, for the Holy Place; the *body*, for the outer court.

Holiness or Sanctification is not a quality or attribute which can be attributed to us apart from the indwelling of the Holy One. If we would be holy, we must be indwelt by Him who is holy. If we would have holiness, we must be infilled by the Holy One. But there must be no limiting of his power, no barrier to his control, no veiling or curtaining of his light. The veil, if such there be, must be rent in twain from the top to the bottom.

The money that cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of the Lord. [2 Kings xii. 4.](#)

THE margin suggests that the thought of giving for God's house would ascend in a man's heart, till it became the royal and predominant thought, swaying the whole man to obedience. It is a beautiful conception !

For the reconstruction of the Temple there were two classes of revenue: the tribute money which each Israelite was bound to give, and the money which a man might feel prompted to give. Surely the latter was the more precious in the eye of God.

Does it ever come into your heart to bring some money into the house of God? Perhaps the suggestion comes, but you put it away, and refuse to consider it. The thought begins to ascend in your heart, but you thrust it down and back, saying, Why should I part with what has cost me so much to get! Beware of stifling these generous promptings. To yield to them would bring untold blessing into heart and life. Besides, the money is only yours as a stewardship; and the thought to give it to God is only the Master's request for his own.

The great mistake with us all is, that we do not hold all our property at God's disposal, seeking his directions for its administration; and that we forget how freely we have received that we may resemble our Father in heaven, and freely give. Too many, alas! are anxious to hoard up and keep for themselves that which God has given them, instead of counting themselves and all they have as purchased property, and using all things as his representatives and trustees. Let us make a complete surrender to our Lord, and from the heart sing,

"Take my silver and my gold,
Not a mite would I withhold.

He smote thrice and stayed. [2 Kings xiii. 18.](#)

A STRIKING spectacle. The dying prophet, with his thin hands on the muscular hands of the young king, as he shoots his arrow through the eastern window; the exhortation to smite the remaining arrows on the ground; the bitter chiding that the king had struck thrice only, instead of five or six times. What lessons are here! The Lord Jesus put his hands upon ours. Here is the reverse to the incident referred to. Ours are weak, his are strong; ours would miss the mark, his will direct the arrows, if only we will allow Him, with unerring precision. We shoot, but the Lord directs the arrow's flight to the heart of his foes.

Our success is commensurate with our faith. If we strike but thrice, we conquer but thrice. If we strike seven times, we attain a perfect victory over the adversary. Is not this the cause of comparative failure in Gospel effort? Souls are not saved because we do not expect them to be saved. A few are saved, because we only believe for a few. It is one of the most radical laws in the universe of God, and one which our Lord repeatedly emphasized, that our faith determines the less or more in our own growth, and in the victories we win for Christ. Do not stay, soul-winner, but smite again and yet again in the secret of thy chamber, that thou mayest smite Satan, and compel him to acknowledge thy might.

Let us not stay, though the energy of earlier days may be ebbing fast. The sanctified spirit waxes only stronger and more heroic, as Elisha's and Paul's did, amid the decay of mortal power. The Lord will say to us, as He did to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Every man shall be put to death for his own sin. [2 Kings xiv. 6.](#)

SO ran the law of Moses. It forbade the imposition of punishment on the relatives of the wrong-doer, but it had no mercy on him. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," was the succinct and conclusive verdict of the older law, in this reflecting the spirit and letter of one yet older, which ran, "The day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

First, we were dead in our sins. — [Eph. ii. 5](#) puts this beyond all doubt. In the sight of God, all who walk according to the course of this world, and obey the prince that now worketh in the children of this world, are dead in trespasses and sins. However much they may be alive as to their souls, they are dead as to their spirits, entirely destitute of the life of God.

Second, we have died for our sins. — [2 Cor. v. 14, 15](#) (R.V.) establishes this fact, and shows that in Jesus, we who believe in Him, are reckoned to have died in Him when He bore our sins in his own body on the tree. In God's estimate, his death is imputed to us; so that we are reckoned as having satisfied, in Jesus, the demands of a broken law. It has no more to ask.

Third, we must die to our sin. — [Rom. vi. 11](#). Reckon that you have died, and whenever sin arises, to menace or allure you, point back to the grave, and argue that since you died in Christ, you have passed altogether beyond its jurisdiction, for you have yielded your members as weapons of righteousness unto God. And having been crucified with Christ, you now no longer live, but Christ liveth in you. Let it become your daily habit to place the grave of Jesus between yourself and all allurements of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. [2 Kings xv. 9, 18, 24, 28.](#)

THIS chapter anticipates the final overthrow of the kingdom of the tribes. It describes the corruption and disorganization of the people which made them the easy prey of Assyria. One puppet-king after another was set upon the throne to fall after a brief space of rule, and four times over it is said that they followed in the steps of Jeroboam, "who made Israel to sin." The seed sown two hundred years before had at last come to maturity, issuing in the ruin of the nation. 'What a comment on the inspired words, "Sin, when it is finished, bridgeth forth death."

Twelve times in the story of the kingdom of Israel we are told that Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, made Israel to sin. The institution of the calves on his part seemed to be a piece of political wisdom, but it was an infraction of the Divine law; and what is morally wrong can never be politically right. The house cannot stand unless the foundation can bear the test of the Divine plummet. The kingdom of Israel fell, to prove to all after-time that the disregard of God's law is a foundation of sand, which can never resist the test of time.

Why is Jeroboam so frequently called "the son of Nebat"? Why should the father be forever pilloried with the son, except that he was in some way responsible for, and implicated in, his sins? There was a time when perhaps Nebat might have restrained the growing boy, or led him to the true worship of God; or perhaps his parental influence and example were deadly in their effect. How important that parents should leave no stone unturned to promote the godliness of their children, bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

King Ahaz sent to Urijah the fashion of the alter and the pattern of it. [2 Kings xvi. 10.](#)

THE fashion of this world passeth away like a fleeting dream; or like the panorama of clouds that constitutes a pavilion of the setting sun, but which, whilst we gaze, tumbles into a mass of red ruin. And yet we are always so prone to imitate King Ahaz, and visit Damascus with the intention of procuring the latest design, and introducing it, even into the service of the sanctuary.

Man naturally imitates. He must get the pattern of his work from above, or beneath; from God or the devil: hence, the repeated injunction to us all, to make all things after the pattern shown on the mount. If we would be rid of the influence of worldly fashion, we must conform ourselves to the heavenly and divine. The pattern of the Body of Christ — of the position of each individual believer among its members, and of the work which each should accomplish — was fixed before the worlds were made. The best cure for worldliness is not unworldliness, but other-worldliness. The best way of resisting the trend of people around us is to cultivate the speech, thought, and behaviour of that celestial world to which we are bound by the most sacred ties, and whither we are travelling at every heart-throb.

This introduction of the altar of a heathen shrine into the holy temple of Jerusalem, reminds us of the many rites in modern religious observances which have been borrowed from paganism, and warns us that the Church has no right to go to the world for its methods and principles. Let the world do as it may in its discussions about truth, its efforts to attract attention, and its organizations; our course is clear — not to build altars after its fashion, nor model our life on its maxims.

These nations feared the Lord, and served their graven images. [2 Kings xvii. 41.](#)

IT was a curious mixture. These people had come from Babylon, Hamath, and Sepharvaim, and were settled in the land from which Israel was deported. In their desire to propitiate the God of the country, they added his worship to that of their own gods (ver. 32), though they did not really fear Him (ver. 34). There was an outward recognition of the God of Israel, which was worse than useless. Are you sure this is not a true description of your own position? You pay an outward deference to God by attending his house, and acknowledging his day, whilst you are really prostrating yourself before other shrines. The one originates in a superstitious fear, a desire to stand well with your fellows; but it is in the direction of the other that your heart really goes. You come as his people come, sit as his people sit, kneel as his people kneel; but your heart is far apart, and you only do as you do that you may follow your own evil ways with less fear of discovery.

With all of us there is too much of this double worship; but let it be clearly understood that it is only apparent, not real. No man ever really serves two masters, or worships two gods. Whatever conflicts with God in heart or life is our chosen god. Whatever appears to share our heart with God really holds our heart. God will never be in competition with another. He must either be all or none.

The soul that endeavours to divide its service between Jehovah on the first day, and its graven images all the other days of the week, might as well discontinue its religious observances, for they count for nothing: except to blind it to its true condition.

Now on whom dost thou trust? [2 Kings xviii. 20.](#)

IT was no small thing for Hezekiah to rebel against the proud king of Assyria. Hamath and Arpad, Samaria and Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivah, reduced to heaps of stones, were sufficient proofs of the might of his ruthless soldiers. How could Jerusalem hope to withstand? Rabshakeh could not comprehend the secret source of Hezekiah's confidence. It was of no use for him to turn to Egypt. Pharaoh was a bruised reed. And as for Jehovah! Was there any likelihood that He could do for Israel more, than the gods of the other nations had done for them? Not infrequently does the puzzled world ask the Church, "In whom dost thou trust? "

Our life must to a large extent be a mystery, our peace pass understanding, and our motives be hidden. The sources of our supply, the ground of our confidence, the reasons for our actions, must evade the most searching scrutiny of those who stand outside the charmed circle of the face of God; as it is written, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard what God hath prepared."

We all ought to have the secrets which the world cannot penetrate. Doubt your religion if it all lies on the surface, and if men are able to calculate to a nicety the considerations by which you are actuated. We must be prepared to be misunderstood and criticised, because our behaviour is determined by facts which the princes of this world know not. We do not look up to the hills, because we look beyond them to God; we do not trust in silver or gold, or human resource, because God is our confidence. We cannot but seem eccentric to this world, because we have found another centre, and are concentric with the Eternal Throne.

And Hezekiah spread it before the Lord. [2 Kings xix. 14.](#)

AMID the panic that reigned in Jerusalem, the king and the prophet alone kept level heads, for they alone had quiet, trustful hearts. We hardly realize the crisis unless we compare it with the march of 200,000 Kurds or Turkish soldiers upon some peaceful Armenian community. Israel had no earthly allies. Her only reinforcements could reach her from heaven, and it was the care of these two saintly men to implicate their cause with that of the living God (ver. 4). This is the faith that overcomes the world, which realizes that God lives here and now in our home and life and circumstances. His cause is implicated in our deliverance; his name will be disgraced if we are overwhelmed, and honoured, if preserved. He is our Judge, Lawgiver, and King, and is therefore bound by the most solemn obligations to save us, or his name will be tarnished.

When therefore letters come to you, anonymous or otherwise, full of bitter reproach; when unkind and malignant stories are set on foot with respect to you; when all hope from man has perished, then take your complaint — the letter, the article, the speech, the rumour — and lay it before God. Let your requests be made known unto Him. Tell Him how absolutely you trust. Then malice and fear will pass from your heart, whilst peace and love will take their place: and presently there will come a swift message of comfort, like that which Isaiah, the son of Amoz, sent to Hezekiah, saying on the behalf of God, "That which thou hast prayed to Me, I have heard."

God knew the contents of the missive before you did; but He likes to read it again in the company of his child.

Let the shadow return backward ten degrees. [2 Kings xx. 10.](#)

IT is impossible for us to understand how this could be. The shadow of the declining day waxes ever longer, and only a miracle could change its appearance on the dial. It may suggest some significant thoughts about shadows that may still go back.

The shadow of a wasted life. — Of course, there is a sense in which the wasted years will never come again; they have passed beyond recall. But the shadow may go back on the dial of our life when we truly repent, and turn again to God, for He hath promised: "I will never leave thee, neither forsake thee." And "I will give back the years that the canker worm and caterpillar have eaten."

The shadow of happier days. — These seem to have gone. For long you have noticed the growing twilight, and it has seemed impossible ever again to have the lightness and spring of one or two decades back. But be of good cheer, for when a man comes into that fellowship with God which sorrow and temptation teach, when with growing years he attains added grace, we are told that he shall return to the days of his youth.

The shadow of early affection. — Have you lost loved ones, so that your life is like a house the windows of which, one after another, have become shuttered and dark? But love is not forfeited for ever. Those who forsake all for Christ's sake shall get all back again in Him. His love comprehends all human love. The relationships of his kingdom surpass in tenderness and tenacity those of the warmest earthly ties. Thy brother shall rise again, and thou shalt hear him call thy name, and shalt sit with him in the Home of Life.

And his mother's name was Hephzi-bah. [2 Kings xxi. 1.](#)

HEPHZI-BAH means, "My delight is in her" (Isa. Ixii. 4). How strange, supposing that her name was any indication of her character, that such a woman should have borne such a son; for "Manasseh did wickedly above all the Amorites did which were before him." A godly ancestry, however, does not guarantee a holy seed. Hezekiahs and Hephzi-bahs may be the parents of manassehs. That this may not be so: —

Let us guard against the inconsistencies of our private life. — The child of religious parents becomes habituated to their use of expressions in public which betoken the highest degree of holiness, and is therefore quicker to notice any inconsistency in temper or walk. Is there not a subtle temptation also for those who work much for God in public to feel that a certain laxity is permissible in the home? Will not late after-meetings at night compensate for indolence in the morning; and will not protracted services be the equivalent for private prayer? May not irritability to servants or children be accounted for by the overstrain of our great work? Hence, inconsistency and failure to realize our lofty aims, which are quickly noticed, beget distaste for our religion.

Let us guard against absorption in public religious duty to the neglect of the home. — Does it never happen that the children of religious parents are put to bed by nurses who are heedless of their prayers, because their mothers have undertaken a mission? Do not boys sometimes grow up without the correcting influence of the father's character, because he, good man, is so taken up with committees?

Let us guard against an austerity of manner, which prevents us being the companions, play-fellows, and associates of our children.

Thou shalt be gathered into thy grave in peace. [2 Kings xxii. 20.](#)

AS a matter of fact, Josiah's death was not a peaceful one. He persisted in going into conflict with Pharaoh-necho, king of Egypt, against the latter's earnest remonstrance (see [2 Chron. xxxv. 20-22](#)); and, in consequence of his hardihood, met his death. His servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo (ch. xxiii. 30). Is there, then, any real contradiction between the prophet's prediction and this sad event?

Certainly not! The one tells us what God was prepared to do for his servant; the other what he brought on himself by his own folly. There are many instances of this change of purpose in the Word of God. One of them is known as "his breach of promise," or "altering of purpose " ([Num. xiv. 34](#), marg.). He would have saved his people from the forty years' wandering in the wilderness, but they made Him to serve with their sins, and wearied Him with their iniquities. He would have gathered Jerusalem as a hen gathers her brood, but she would not.

Let us beware lest, a promise being left us, we should seem to come short of it; lest there be in any of us an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, and frustrating some blessed purpose of his heart. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him "; but we may limit the Holy One of Israel, and so restrain Him by our unbelief as to stay the mighty works which are in his plan for us. He may desire for us a prosperous life and a peaceful death; but we may close our dying eyes amid disaster and defeat, because we wilfully chose our own way.

Like unto Josiah was there no king before him. [2 Kings xxiii. 25.](#)

THIS chapter is a marvellous record of cleansing and purging. We are led from one item to another of drastic reform. Nothing was spared that savoured of idolatry. Priests and altars, buildings and groves, came under the searching scrutiny of this true-hearted monarch; and, as the result, it was possible to keep such a Passover as had not been observed during the days of the judges or the kings (ver. 22).

How much our enjoyment of the solemn feast depends upon our previous efforts to put away from our lives all that is inconsistent with the law of God. We hardly realize how insidiously evils creep in. Before we are aware, we have fallen beneath God's ideal, and adopted the customs of our neighbours, or of those with whom we come into daily contact. All such declension hinders our joy in keeping the Passover. It is needful, therefore, that there should be times when we turn to God with fresh devotion, and in the light of his holy truth pass the various departments of our life under review, testing everything by the Book of the Law. In Josiah's case, the sacred volume was recovered from long neglect; in our case it needs to be re-read in the light of higher resolves. This would be like a new discovery. Our ultimate rule must always be the will of God, appreciated with growing clearness, and used as a standard by which to judge the habits and tenets of our life. We read the Bible for purposes of a truer knowledge of God and his ways, and for spiritual quickening; but let us also use it more frequently as the bath of the spirit. Let us bathe in it. Let us revel in it as the grimy children of the slums in the laughing wavelets of river and sea.

He carried out thence all the treasures of the House of the Lord. [2 Kings xxiv. 13.](#)

AMONGST these deported treasures must have been much of the sacred furniture of the Temple, and the holy vessels; because, in the days of Belshazzar, find them brought out to grace the royal banquet. Belshazzar drank wine from them with his lords, wives, and concubines, whilst they praised the gods of Babylon, who had given them victory over their foes. Amongst the rest was the golden candlestick, whose flame afterwards illuminated the inscription of doom, written by God's hand upon the palace wall. By the command of Cyrus these precious vessels were finally restored ([Ezra v. 14](#)), and carried back to Jerusalem, by a faithful band of priests (viii. 33).

The whole story of the captivity is full of solemn lessons. — The Church of God must make her choice between one of two courses: either she must keep from all entangling alliances, and from vying for temporal power; or she must face the liability of being brought under the power with which she would fain assimilate. Israel wanted to be as the other nations around her, imitating their organization, and allying herself now with one, and then with another; in consequence she was swept into captivity to the very nation whose fashions she most affected ([Isa. xxxviii.](#)).

Have we never tasted the bitters of captivity? — Borne away from our happy early homes to live among strangers, set to repugnant tasks, removed from all that made life worth living, we have known the exile's lot. Alas! if it be so; yet, even in our captivity, where the Lord's song is silenced, and our harps hang from the willows, if we repent, and put away our sins, and turn again to the Lord, He will not only have mercy, but abundantly pardon, and bring us again that we may be as we were in times past.

Every day a portion, all the days of his life [2 Kings xxv. 30](#) (R.V.).

IS it to be supposed that the king of Babylon took more care of Jehoiachin than God will take of us? Jehoiachin had resisted his suzerain, and cost him a great expenditure of men and treasure; but nothing which had transpired in the past hindered this provision of a daily supply. Will God do less for you, his child? Would it not come as a relief if you were to be told that, from this moment till you die, you could always have a sufficient provision of all the necessaries of life? But if you are a child of God, that promise has already been made! Do not be anxious. but believe that God's word is at least as sure and as efficient as man's.

The allowance was continual. — It did not begin with plenty, and gradually dwindle to scraps. The supply was maintained year after year. Will God drop off your supplies, think you, because He forgets, or because his power is exhausted? You know that each supposition is alike untenable. What He has done, He will do. The storehouses of nature open to his key. His are the cattle on a thousand hills.

Every day a portion. — Jehoiachin had not the provisions of a year or a month put down at his door; but as each day broke he was sure of the day's portion. It may be that God is dealing thus with you. Only manna for the day: daily strength for daily need.

All the days of his life. — Jesus is with us "all the days"; and He is the Bread of God, in whom is every property necessary for life. All the days are included in God's care for us, of birth and death, of sunshine and shadow. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life, and you shall dwell in the House of the Lord for ever.

Adam, Sheth, Enosh. [1 Chron. i. 1.](#)

THIS is an ancient graveyard. The names of past generations who were born and died, who loved and suffered, who stormed and fought through the world, are engraven on these solid slabs. But there is no inscription to record their worth or demerit. Just names, and nothing more.

How strange to think that if Christ tarry, our names will be treated with the same apathy as these! So far as this world is concerned, we and all our generation shall pass away. As the flowers of the field, so we shall perish from the earth.

But each of these lives fulfilled a necessary part in the progress of the race. Each was in turn father and son; each passed on the torch of life; each contributed something to the fabric of humanity rising like a coral island from unknown depths. The hill-tops would not be possible but for their lower courses which touch the valleys. We could not have the somebodies without an immense number of nobodies. The flowers of the race were prepared for by the slow progress of the plant through years of growth.

But each was the object of the love of God. Each was included in the redemptive purpose of our Lord; each contributed some minute particle to his nature; each is living yet somewhere; each will have to stand before the judgment-bar of God; each is predestined to live in the unknown world that lies on the other side. It is a stupendous thought to imagine the whole race, rooted in Adam, like one vast far-spreading tree. Ah, reader, be sure that thou art taken out of the first Adam, and grafted into the second — the Lord Jesus; and abiding in him, see 'that thou bring forth much fruit to his glory.

These are the sons of Israel. [1 Chron. ii. 1.](#)

IT is noticeable how irrevocable the Divine sentence is on a human life. Of Er, the grave, impartial voice of Scripture says, he was "wicked in the sight of the Lord"; of Achan, he was the "troubler of Israel, and committed a trespass in the devoted thing." These sentences are recorded with such precision as to admit of no dispute, no appeal; and they sum up the life.

But was there not much else in each of these men? Were there not tender or chivalrous moments? Did they never shine for a moment in some transfiguring ray? Was all their life dyed with these sad and sombre hues? Ah, it may have been so — still the one thing that the Scripture tells of them is the sin in which all their life seemed to culminate and express itself. With unerring accuracy God can distinguish the one act or word by which the character is revealed. He may forgive it, but He holds it up as the epitome or summary of what the life was.

Let us see how we live, walking before God with reverent fear, watching and praying, because any moment may give birth to a word or act which may characterise our life in all coming time. It must be remembered, however, that all these things emanate from the heart. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; but the issues of life proceed thence: it therefore must be watched with all diligence and care. What a man thinks, that he is. The chance word or act is a true indication of the inner life. Therefore it is preserved for all after-time by the voice of God. See that your heart is perfect before God. There is forgiveness; but then is also the unerring verdict.

These were the sons of David. [1 Chron. iii. 1.](#)

BUT how different they were to the Son of David! Contrast any one of these with our blessed Lord, and what an infinite chasm lies between them! Solomon was the most reputable of them, but a greater than Solomon was born in Bethlehem, and cradled in a manger. Surely the least earnest must be struck with the difference in these sons and that Son. But in this difference, is there not the most conspicuous proof of his miraculous conception? Even though the story of his wondrous birth had never been preserved for us by the evangelists, we should have felt convinced that something like it must have happened, in virtue of which He should be the Man of men, the one absolutely flawless and perfect flower on the stem of humanity. With new emphasis we read the familiar words, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore that Holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of GOD."

We, too, who have been born once, need to be born again. To be born of a David does not ensure perfectness of heart and life. Though born of parents, who were after God's own heart and are passed into the skies, we need to be born again, or we may repeat the sins of an Ammon, an Adonijah, an Absalom. It is a serious question to ask whether, like David, we have called his greater Son our Lord. This is the true mark of the new birth. Those who are born of the Holy Ghost call Jesus Lord, and none other. The recognition of the supreme lordship of Jesus is imperative for the peace and right ordering of the heart and life, So we pass to our true stature in Jesus.

Because I bare him with sorrow. [1 Chron. iv. 9.](#)

THE products of sorrow have been the rarest gifts to mankind. The books, hymns, discoveries, deeds, to which men and women have been urged by sorrow, or which have been born into the world amid heart-rending soul-travail, are those which will never be allowed to die, because perennial sources of inspiration and comfort. It was thus with the child of whom we have this brief record. We might becomingly weave the four petitions of the prayer of Jabez into the supplications of each new morning hour.

To be blessed indeed. — Not the lower springs only, but the upper ones also; not life alone, but life more abundantly; not those blessings only which pertain to the body or worldly circumstance, but those spiritual ones of the heavenlies, that are the best donation man can receive or God bestow.

A larger coast. — There is a godly ambition which may be reverently cherished for wider influence over men, not for its own sake, but for the Master's. You may feel that you have fulfilled the measure of your present possibilities, but have unexhausted powers and talents. Tell God so, and ask for a wider extent of territory to bring under cultivation for Him.

Thine hand with me. — The father puts his hand on the boy's hand as he draws back the bowstring, strengthening the thin arms of youth. So will the mighty God of Jacob do for you.

Keep me from evil. — You cannot keep your heart door shut when a tumult of temptation or care assaults it from without; but God's peace and grace, like angel sentries, can avail you. Though tempted, you may be kept in the temptation and delivered from the evil. Thus your spirit, and the Holy Spirit shall be ungrieved.

They cried to God in the battle, and He was entreated of them. [1 Chron. v. 20.](#)

WHETHER they cried to God before they went into the battle we are not told; but probably they did, because we read that the war was of God, and it is hardly likely that they would have prayed to Him in the midst of the fight, when the foemen's blows fell like hail on their armour, if they had not prayed before they entered the bloody fray. Men often excuse themselves for neglecting their morning devotions by saying that they will surely look to God, as they may require his gracious help, in the midst of the day's temptations and needs; but, as a matter of fact, when once they are plunged into its war they forget to look up. You must direct your prayer in the morning, and look up whilst the early shadows lie long on the dewy grass, if you would keep looking off to Jesus, amid the din of the fight.

It is very lovely to contract and preserve this habit of looking upward, and crying to God in the battle. When our feet are slipping, when the foe seems about to overmaster, when heart and flesh fail — how refreshing and strengthening to fling one eager look or cry to heaven, and say, "I am thine, save me." There can be no doubt as to the issue. God is always intreated of those who put their trust in Him. Sooner might a mother forget her sucking child than God be unmindful of one sigh, or tear, or upward glancing look from his own. Oh, child of God, put thou thy trust in God, and go through this tempestuous world as one who is confident of a Divine Ally. At any moment He will ride on the heavens to thy help. "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Heman the singer. [1 Chron. vi. 33.](#)

THIS is a very brief record to put on a man's grave, but a very expressive one. To decipher that epitaph about Heman is to learn a good deal about him. From this clue we might almost construct his entire personality and character. And it would be well if it could be said of us that we had ministered with song before the tabernacle of the Lord.

Would you be a singer — not on Sundays only, but always; not with your voice only, but in your heart; not only when the sunshine pours into the open casement through the swaying boughs of honeysuckle, but when the shutters tell of bereavement and removal — then remember these rules: — (1st.) God must put the new song into your mouth; (2nd.) You must be fully consecrated to Him; for the song of the Lord only begins when the burnt-offering is complete. (3rd.) You must not go into a strange land, for it is impossible to sing the Lord's song there.

Sing on, dear heart, sing on. There is nothing that scares off the devil so quickly as a hymn. Luther said, "Let us sing a hymn, and spite the devil." There is nothing that so well beguiles the pilgrim's step, and quickens his pace, when the miles are growing long and weary. There is nothing that brings so much of heaven into the heart. Singing makes every movement rhythmic, every service praise, every act thanksgiving. Sing when times are dark, you will make them bright; sing when the house of life is lonely, it will become peopled with unseen choristers; go down into the valley of shadow with a song, and you will find yourself singing the new song of Moses and the Lamb when you awake on the other side.

It went evil with his house. [1 Chron. vii. 23.](#)

IT is an old-world tale, and those tears have long since been wiped away. What led to the death of so many of the stalwart sons of Ephraim is not quite clear; but apparently they made a raid from the hill-fastnesses on the men of Gath to lift their cattle, and were repelled with great disaster. At any rate, they were slain by men of Gath, that were born in the land. They were part of the early nations of Canaan that should have been destroyed. This suggests a significant train of thought. We must beware of the tendencies and impulses which were born in us, which we have inherited.

They are strong in all of us. Parents transmit to an awful extent their own passions. What a reason this is for carefully curbing them! I have known the children of drunkards, grown to middle-life, who have confessed that they have never spent a day without the conscious craving for alcohol. These are the men of Gath, born in the land, who will slay us unless we are on our guard.

There will be irremediable sorrow if we yield to them. Many days of mourning will not avail to wipe out the sad and bitter memory of the disaster, when once they have wreaked their wild will on us. If permitted within, they will, like traitors, open the door to Satan without.

But faith is the victory. He that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God; he in whom Jesus lives by the Holy Spirit; he who knows the Stronger than the strong man armed, shall be kept from falling, and preserved unto God's heavenly kingdom. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh."

Esh-baal, . . . Merib-baal. 1 Chron. viii. 33, 34.

BAAL was the idol-god of Zidon and of many surrounding nations. This idol, representing the sun in his productive force, was worshipped with impure and scandalous rites. The introduction of this name into the appellation of one of Saul's sons indicates the secret root of the declension and consequent misfortunes of that ill-fated monarch. In the earlier part of his reign he was perfect in his allegiance to Jehovah — *Jonathan* means "Gift of Jehovah" — but as the years went on, he became proud and self-sufficient; he turned to Baal, the Spirit of the Lord departed from him, and an evil spirit rushed in to take His place, as wind rushes in to fill a vacuum.

The name which Jonathan gave his son had another significance. Merib-baal is one who opposes Baal. It is as though he would indelibly stamp upon his child an undying hatred and opposition to that idolatry which was undoing his father's character and kingdom. In this choice of his child's name we also gather the deep-seated piety and devotion of that noble soul, whose heart was true to God amid the darkening shadows of his father's reign. It was this that probably drew David and him so closely in affinity.

How absolutely necessary it is for the peace of a household that there should be a oneness of devotion to God! Where that is the first consideration, there is peace and blessedness; and that it may be so, it is of the greatest importance that the parents should be constant in their godly allegiance. The ruin of Saul's home, family, and realm, began in his personal disloyalty to God; and how far he influenced the nation for evil it is difficult to estimate.

Chosen to be porters . . . appointed over the furniture; . . . the singers. [1 Chron. ix. 22, 29, 31, 33.](#)

WHAT a busy scene is suggested in these words! When the morning broke, it called to duty first the porters who opened the House of God; and then, after due ablution, each band of white-robed Levites began its special service. There was no running to and fro in disorder, no intrusion on one another's office, no clashing in duty, no jealousy of each other's ministry. It was enough to know that each had been appointed to his task, and was asked to be faithful to it. The right ordering of the whole depended on the punctuality, fidelity, and conscientiousness of each.

So it is in the Church of Christ, each is specially gifted for some post to which he has been set apart. One to see to the gates, admitting souls to the kingdom; one to the baking in pans, attending to the feeding of the household of God; some are appointed to the furnishing and maintaining of the House of Prayer; others to the psalmody, as the hymn-writers of our praise and holy song. How beautiful it is when we dwell together in this unity, not envying one another, nor interfering in each other's ministry. "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers: for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Whatever is successfully done by the Church is accredited by Christ to each faithful servant, just as the impression produced on the audience by an orchestra is the result of each instrument, even to the piccolo, doing its part. Whatever is done by the whole, is done by each part of the whole. Be content with the position to which thy Master has assigned thee, and let thine eye be single unto Him. So shall each have praise of God.

So Saul died for his trespass. [1 Chron. x. 13](#) (R.V.).

IT is suggestive to ponder the threefold analysis of Saul's trespass as given here. He kept not the word of the Lord — this probably refers to his failure to execute the sentence on Amalck; he asked counsel of one that had a familiar spirit — this errand had taken him to Endor on the eve of the battle; he enquired not of the Lord — this was conspicuously the case in his persecution of David.

Do we sufficiently inquire of the Lord? We ask the advice of our friends and religious teachers; we sometimes use doubtful methods of ascertaining God's will, as allowing the Bible to drop open, or interpreting some coincidence in the way we secretly desire to follow; besides which there is an increasing tendency in society to use the crystal, to consult spiritualistic mediums, to employ palmistry. These latter, course, repeat the sin of Saul, in going to Endor; and the resort to them on the part of children of this world shows that the heart of man must have something exterior to itself for worship and trust; if it has Forsaken God, it will deal with the devil rather than drift on alone. But let us all cultivate more carefully the blessed habit of waiting on God. If we ask Him for guidance, He will be sure to impart it; only we must put aside all selfish and personal ends, desiring to know his will, with a single purpose, and an unalloyed determination to follow it at any cost.

Christ has told us that willingness to do his will is the sure organ of spiritual knowledge. "He that wills to do his will, shall know." Be of good cheer, beloved: God hath chosen thee that thou shouldst know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldst hear the voice of his mouth.

Oh that one would give me drink of the water at the well of Bethlehem! [1 Chron. xi. 17.](#)

DAVID had often drunk of this well. As a boy he had gone with his mother to draw its clear, cold water. It was, therefore, associated with the happy days of childhood and youth that lay behind the haze of the years. In the sultry afternoon, as, from the cave in which he was hiding, he looked across the valley where his ancestress Ruth had gleaned in the fields of Boaz, to the long straggling town of his birth, it seemed as though nothing could stay his passionate longing for a draught of the water of the well of Bethlehem that was at the gate.

Sometimes longings like his take possession of us. We desire to drink again the waters of comparative innocence, of child-like trust and joy; to drink again of the fountains of human love; to have the bright, fresh rapture in God, and nature, and home. But it is a mistake to look back. Here and now, within us, Jesus is waiting to open the well of living water which springs up to eternal life, of which if we drink we never thirst.

Purity is better than innocence; the blessedness which comes through suffering is richer than the gladsomeness of childhood; the peace of the heart is more than peace of circumstances. We have solace in Jesus, which even the dear love of home could not equal; and before us lies the reunion with the blessed dead. How shall we thank Him who, at the cost of his own blood, broke through the hosts of our foes, and won for us the river of life; and who for evermore will lead us to the fountains, where life rises fresh from the heart of God! Listen to his voice as He bids us drink abundantly: "Let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

All these men of war, that could keep rank, came to make David king. [1 Chron. xii. 38.](#)

THE crowning of David secured the unity of Israel. Because all these men of war converged on the chosen king, they met each other, and became one great nation. The enthroning of David was the uniting of the kingdom. Herein is the secret of the unity of the Church. We shall never secure it by endeavouring to bring about an unity in thought, or act, or organization. It is as each individual heart enthrones the Saviour that each will become one with all kindred souls in the everlasting kingdom.

Is your heart perfect to make Christ king? We read in verse 33 of Zebulon, whose warriors were not of a double heart; the margin says they were "without a heart and a heart." The double-minded man is unstable in all his ways; he is not to be relied upon in his loyalty or service to his king. The only blessed life is that of the man whose eye is single. It is only such an one that receives anything from the Lord. Let us ask that the thoughts of our hearts may be cleansed by the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit, that our hearts may be perfect towards Him, and so perfect to all who hold Jesus as King and Head, though they differ from us in minor points. Different regiments, but one army, one movement, one king.

Let us learn to keep rank, shoulder to shoulder, and in step, with our brethren. Too many like to break the ranks, and do God's work independently. Fifty men who act together will do greater execution than five hundred acting apart. There is too much of this guerilla fighting. Unity is strength; and in their efforts to overthrow the kingdom of Satan it is most essential that the soldiers of Christ move in rank and keep step.

And David was afraid of God that day. [1 Chron. xiii. 12.](#)

THERE was no reason for David to be afraid of God, if he conformed to the rules laid down in Leviticus. There it was expressly ordained that the Ark should be carried on the shoulders of the priests, because the cause of God must proceed through the world by the means of consecrated men, rather than by mechanical instrumentality. David ignored this provision when he placed the Ark on the new cart. He disobeyed the distinct law of the Divine procedure. What wonder that Uzza was struck dead! Fire will burn if you persist in violating its law. Obed-edom, on the other hand, studiously obeyed, so far as he knew them, the Divine regulations, and to him the Ark was a source of blessing; just as fire will toil for us in our furnaces and grates, and be the greatest possible benediction to human life, if only we carefully conform to its ascertained and immutable law.

God is to us what we are to Him. To Pharaoh, blackness and darkness; to Israel, light and help. To the froward, He is froward; to the merciful man, merciful. To one of the thieves, the cross of Christ was the savour of death unto death, because his heart was impenitent; to the other, the savour of life unto life, because his heart was soft and believing. You need not fear God so long as you walk in his ways and do his will. He is to be feared only by those who violate his law. God is a consuming fire. He will make a breach on those who disobey Him. He will consume the evil of our inner life. But let Him be welcomed into your life and home; let the Ark, which is the symbol of his presence, dwell within; bring up your children to minister unto Him; and you will be blessed, with all that you have.

Then thou shalt go out to battle; for God is gone forth before thee. [1 Chron. xiv. 15.](#)

WHAT was this "going"? It was not merely a fitful breeze stealing through the leaves; it was not the going of the wind; but of angel squadrons who were proceeding against the enemies of Israel. This thought often occurs in Scripture — as when Jacob met God's host; and the warrior-Saviour told Joshua that He was captain of a host whom God had commissioned to take Jericho; so also the horses and chariots of fire surrounded Elisha. Harken to the measured footfall of God's host, beneath which the mulberry trees sway, though no wind stirs the sultry air.

God's hosts go forth against his foes and ours. Perhaps we should feel less oppressed with the burden of the fight if we realized this. The battle is not ours, but God's. He will deliver the Philistines to us so that we shall have to do little else than fight and spoil. Oh, believe in the co-operation of the Holy Spirit. Lonely missionary in some distant station of the foreign field, listen for the moving in the tops of the mulberry trees! God is stirring for thy succour. Thou art a co-worker with Him in making known his salvation; and He will prosper thee.

Let us wait for our instructions. David inquired of the Lord; let us not anticipate Him. It is useless to go up until He has gone out before us. We may as well save ourselves from disappointment by quietly waiting for the salvation of our God. But oh, be sure that those who wait for God shall not be long before the God for whom they wait shall go forth before them to smite the host, whether it be the hosts of temptation that oppress the inner life, or the hosts of spiritual foes that oppose the progress of God's work.

And Chenaniah, chief of the Levites, was for song. [1 Chron. xv. 22.](#)

THE carrying of the Ark to its right place was associated with every expression of gladness on the part of king and people; but there were some who were specially set apart as the exponents of the general joy. In the old time such were David, Heman, Asaph, Chenaniah; in our time, Watts and Doddridge, Wesley and Toplady, Keble, Havergal, and Bonar.

It is good to be for song. Many a heart that cannot rank as a musician or poet, may yet be susceptible to the joy of the Lord, which is ever passing through creation, catching it up so as to express it. As the Ark of the Lord comes to its place within you, sing.

Song is harmony with the life of God. The will of God sometimes enters life as a sigh, as David's first attempt to move the Ark; but afterwards it becomes a song, as in the second attempt. Enshrine the Ark of God with its tables of stone, its mercy-seat of fellowship, its worshipping Cherubim in the Holy of Holies within; and you will find sighs turned to songs, tears to thanks, mourning to the garment of praise.

Worship the will of God. Conform your life with it. Draw on the ground a circle to represent God's will, and step into it, resolving never to step out of its blessed precincts again. Dare to believe and confess that Paradise lies within, though it may be veiled to sight and sense. According to your faith it shall be unto you. If you believe that heaven is there, you will find heaven. The Ark of God is ever a provocative of song. His statutes seem awful in the distance; but so soon as we begin to practise them, they turn to songs

Talk ye of all His wondrous works. [1 Chron. xvi. 9.](#)

WE do not talk sufficiently about God. Why it is so may not be easy to explain; but there seems a too great reticence among Christian people about the best things. In the days of Malachi, "they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard." We talk about sermons, details of worship and church organization, or the latest phase of Scripture criticism; we discuss men, methods, and churches; but our talk in the home, and in the gatherings of Christians for social purposes, is too seldom about the wonderful works of God. Better to speak less, and to talk more of Him.

But probably the real cause of our avoidance of this best of topics, is that our hearts are filled with so much which is not of God, and they speak out of their abundance. You may judge the contents of a shop by what is put in the windows; and you may judge of the inner life of too many Christians by the subjects which are most familiar to their lips. The heart does not seek for God and his strength, nor his face continually; and therefore we find it hard to talk of all his wondrous works.

But go back in thought to the day of Pentecost. One of the first signs of the descent of the blessed Spirit was that the crowd heard every man speaking in his own tongue the wonderful works of God. What God has done in the past, as recorded on the page of Scripture; what He is doing day by day in the world around, and in our hearts; what He has promised to do on the horizon where heaven and earth shall blend in the Second Advent — yield fit themes on which his children may beamingly talk to each other, till He goes beside and talks with them till their hearts burn.

Do as Thou hast said, that thy name may be magnified for ever. [1 Chron. xvii. 23, 24.](#)

THIS is a most blessed phase of true prayer. Many a time we ask for things which are not absolutely promised. We are not sure therefore until we have persevered for some time whether our petitions are in the line of God's purpose or no. There are other occasions, and in the life of David this was one, when we are fully persuaded that what we ask is according to God's will. We feel led to take up and plead some promise from the page of Scripture, under the special impression that it contains a message for us.

At such times, in confident faith, we say, "Do as Thou hast said." There is hardly any position more utterly beautiful, strong, or safe, than to put the finger upon some promise of the Divine Word, and claim it. There need be no anguish, or struggle, or wrestling; we simply present the cheque and ask for cash, produce the promise, and claim its fulfilment; nor can there be any doubt as to the issue. It would give much interest to prayer, if we were more definite. It is far better to claim a few things specifically than a score vaguely.

David's argument was not simply that his house might be established, but that God's name might be magnified for ever. It is good when we can lose sight of our personal interests in our keen desire for his glory; when we are so delivered from egotism, that Christ is all and in all. Let the attitude of your soul be more towards the glory of God; and as you quote promise after promise for the enthroning of Christ, the saving of men, and the sanctification of your soul, dare in humble faith to say, Do as Thou hast said, that thy Name may be magnified for ever.

He put garrisons in Edom; and all the Edomites became servants to David. [1 Chron. xviii. 73.](#)

EDOM and Israel were closely related, but there was constant rivalry and war between the two peoples. Sometimes Israel held the upper-hand for a little; but Edom soon broke loose again, and resumed the old independence, with the border forays ([2 Chron. xxi. 10; xxv. 11-14; Psa. cxxxvii. 7](#)). Now, as Edom stands for the flesh, which hungers for the savoury dish, and is willing to give even its birthright of spiritual power to secure it — this long feud is full of interest to us. It reminds us of the strife of [Rom. vii.](#), between the will of the renewed man and the law of the members, ever striving for mastery.

We turn on the pages of our Bibles to Isa. Ixiii., where a mighty Conqueror is seen coming towards the southern frontier of Palestine, with his back on Bozrah and Edom. His garments are dyed with the blood of Israel's foes; and behind Him cities are desolate and depopulated, territories are laid waste without inhabitant, and Edom's hostility is for ever quenched in blood. What a portraiture is here of Jesus, "mighty to save," who in his cross triumphed over principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly. He has overcome the world, the flesh, and the prince of the power of darkness; and stands for evermore between us and our former oppressors.

Let us resign the conflict wholly to Him. We have sought in vain for victory by resolutions and endeavours; by close attention to religious duties; by occupying our mind with various interests, so that we had no leisure to be tempted; by diet and exercise. Now, hand the conflict absolutely over to Jesus: do not even try to help Him: just let Him do all: be quite still, and when temptation comes, let Him meet it.

Let us behave ourselves valiantly for our people, and for the cities of our God. [1 Chron. xix. 13.](#)

THOSE were days in which rough soldiers, like Joab, did not hesitate to speak freely of God to their companions in arms. It is a sorry thing that it is considered a breach of etiquette to mention God's name in polite society. "It is not good form! "

We are reminded in these words of Joab of Cromwell's memorable advice to trust in God and keep the powder dry. David's General felt that the ultimate issue of the battle must be left to God; but that nothing could absolve him and his soldier from doing their best. They, at least, must make careful dispositions for the fight, and show themselves valiant.

This balance of statement and thought between God's work and ours is an evidence of fine Christian sanity. We must believe that God is the ultimate arbiter, but we must ever speak and act as though the responsibility were entirely on ourselves. To believe that God will do all, and therefore to do nothing, is as bad as to believe that God leaves us to our unaided endeavours. We believe in the strength and sufficiency of God's purpose; but we know that there is link in the chain of causation which we must supply.

The servant of God who counts most absolutely on the communion and co-operation of the Divine Spirit will be most careful in making all needful dispositions for the fight. He will leave no stone unturned to secure the victory, though he knows that the ultimate decision rests with God. The conquests of the cross recorded in the Acts of the Apostles were the result of the united action of the Holy Spirit and the men who were sent forth with the message of the gospel "We are labourers together with God."

The time when Kings go out to battle. . . . But David tarried at Jerusalem. [1 Chron. xx. 1.](#)

THERE are times and tides in the affairs of men. Favourable moments for doing and daring, for attempting and achieving. Hours when the ship must be launched, or it will have to wait for another spring tide. Days when the seed must be sown, or it will have to tarry till another autumn. Royal natures show their quality by taking advantage of times like these, when God and circumstances favour a great attempt.

Alas, if long-continued prosperity has robbed the kingly soul of its desire or power to use its sacred opportunity! Once missed, it may never recur; and the soul that has missed it condemns itself, and loses heart, and surrenders itself to lower and ever lower depths of temptation.

Beware of moments and hours of ease. It is in these that we most easily fall into the power of Satan. The sultriest summer days are most laden with blight. There is no such guard against temptation — next to the keeping power of Jesus, which is all-sufficient — as occupation to the full measure of time and capacity. If we cannot fill our days with our own matters, there is always plenty to be done for others. You think that no one has hired you, but it is not so; the Master has sent you into his vineyard. If you cannot do one thing, you can another. There is the ministry of intercession for those who are in the field. There is the exercise of worship, in which you take your place amongst the priests. There is the ministry of comfort to some of the sad hearts within your own circle. Redeem the time, because the days are evil. Watch and pray in days of vacation and ease, even more than at other times.

And David said unto God, I have sinned greatly in that I have done this thing. [1 Chron. xxi. 8](#) (R.V.).

HIS sin lay in the spirit of pride and display. He vaunted in the growing numbers of Israel, and credited them to himself, as the result of his own prowess and prudence. All such boasting is very abhorrent to the all-holy God, who will not give his glory to another. It was the sin of Nebuchadnezzar, when he said, "Is not this great Babylon which I have built?" It was the sin of Herod Agrippa when the people shouted, saying, "The voice of a god, and not of a man"; and immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, "because he gave not God the glory."

We are all tempted to it when we count up the number of our adherents and converts; when we unroll our securities and vouchers; when we count up our assets; when we display our jewels. All these are gifts entrusted to our care by our Father and Saviour, to be held in trust as a matter for gratitude rather than for pride.

How greatly David had fallen from the level of his own sweet sonnet! — "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty." Oh, let us ask our Master Christ to teach us how to be meek and lowly in heart, that we may find rest unto our souls; let us endeavour to be as little children, devoid of self-consciousness; and let us be careful, as we survey the growing treasures and power of our lives, to remember the Apostle's words: "Who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? But if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?"

How well John the Baptist parried the temptation to jealousy, when he said, "A man can receive nothing unless it be given him from heaven."

A man of rest . . . he shall build. [1 Chron. xxii. 9, 10.](#)

THE men of rest are the builders of the most lasting structures. Solomon builds the Temple, not David. Mary's deed of anointing, learnt in much sitting at the Lord's feet, fills the world with its aroma. What is needed to make us men and women of rest?

First, a profound conviction that God is working. — Never despair of the world, said the late Mrs. Beecher Stowe, when you remember what God did with slavery: the best possible must happen. This serene faith, that all things are working out for the best — the best to God, the best to man — and that God is at the heart of all, will calm and still us in the most feverish days. There is a strong and an experienced Hand on the helm.

Next, an entire surrender to his will. — God's will is certain to mean the destruction of the flesh, in whatever form He finds it; but it is our part to yield to Him; to will his will even to the cross; to follow our leader Christ in this, that He yielded Himself without reserve to execute his Father's purpose.

Thirdly, a certain knowledge that He is working within to will and do of his good pleasure. — what a blessed peace possesses us when once we realize that we are not called on to originate or initiate, nor to make great far-reaching plans and try to execute them; but just to believe that God is prepared to work through our hands, speak by our life, dwell in our bodies, and fulfil in us the good purposes of his will. Be full of God's rest. Let there be no hurry, precipitation, or fret; yield to God's hands, that He may mould thee: hush thy quickly throbbing pulse! So shalt thou build to good and lasting purpose.

Aaron was separated, he and his sons for ever, to minister unto Him. [1 Chron. xxiii. 13.](#)

THE threefold office of Aaron suggests our own. When we are prepared to follow Jesus, through the rent veil of his flesh, living a truly separated life, cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, we also, as chosen priests, may exercise these functions of intercession, ministry, and blessing.

Intercession. — The fragrant incense stealing heavenward is a beautiful emblem of intercessory prayer. Let us pray more, not for ourselves so much as for others. This is the sign of growth in grace, when our prayers are fragrant with the names of friend and foe, and mingled with the coals of the golden altar. This is one of the best gifts; oh to exercise it more persistently!

Ministry. — We have many things to engage our attention, but they maybe unified and elevated by the one threading purpose of doing all for the King. Whether we eat, or drink, or whatever else we do, we may do all to his glory. Go up and down in the Temple, priests; engage in song, or sacrifice, or whatever ministry you will: but be sure that all is of Him, and through Him, and to Him for ever.

Blessing. — As Aaron came forth from the most Holy Place to bless the congregation that waited for him, so we should bless that little portion of the world in which our lot is cast. It is not enough to linger in soft prayer within the veil, we must come forth to bless mankind. He who is nearest God is closest man. Let our smile, our touch, our words, our life, be the greatest blessing possible to those who know us best.

Blessed Spirit, realize through each of us this threefold ideal, and separate us from sin and the world, that we may be prepared for it.

Princes of the Sanctuary. 1 Chron. xxiv. 5 (R.V.).

IT is not enough for us to be in the sanctuary, we must be princes there. There must be the regal mien, which is a meek humility; the real largesse, which is peace and blessing; and the regal might, which is self-restraint and self-control. None can be princes of the sanctuary without two things: *they must be priests*, come of the priestly line; and *kings*, royal not because of deeds of war, but because they are related to the King Himself, and are regal in their holy and blameless character.

There is only one power that can make us princes of the sanctuary — the hand of the exalted Lamb, who is Himself a Priest-King, after the order of Melchizedek. He it is who makes us kings and priests unto God his Father.

He makes us priests. — This is your position, not now to offer propitiatory sacrifices, but to present yourselves a living sacrifice; to have compassion on the ignorant, and on those who are out of the way; to swing the censer of prayer between the living and the dead, so that plagues may be stayed; and to plead for the dark sad world, with its load of wretchedness, need, and sin. See that your garments are ever white and stainless.

He makes us kings. — We reign with Him. Sin and Satan, the world and the flesh, are beneath our feet. Ours the life of overcoming power, of unbroken victory, of identification with Jesus in the glory that the Father has given Him. They that receive the abundance of his grace reign. It is there for us all, but many do not know, or knowing do not appreciate. It is on our reception by faith of God's abundant grace, that we reign in this life, and the next.

All these were under the hands of their father for song. [1 Chron. xxv. 5, 6.](#)

WHAT a glorious family was here! The household was a band of choristers! From morning till night their home must have been full of holy song and psalm, or talk about the order of the Temple service, in which they were all so deeply interested. Surely no jarring note, no unholy discord, would live in such an atmosphere! The common occupation and worship must have welded the brothers and sisters into to the tenderest union.

How one would like to have seen Heman coming into the Temple with his children! It was largely owing to him and their mother that they were what they were. We shall read the Psalms ascribed to him with more interest, now we know of the holy family life out of which they emanated. What interest there would be when the father had produced a new psalm, to know what music would suit it best!

Parents! Be sure that you look on your children, as these Hebrews did on theirs, as the gifts of God; and remember that if He gives you many months to feed, He will send the wherewithal to feed them. Be careful also that your own hearts and lives are full of praise and prayer; what you are, the children will become. Would that mothers especially realized how they transmit their characters. But remember that you must be obeyed in the home. Heman's children were "under the hands of their father." Young people must not get the upper hand.

But if you would rule well, you must obey. Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, were under the king (6, R.V.). The man who is himself under authority, can say, Go, come, do this or that, with the calm assurance of being obeyed.

For the courses of the doorkeepers. [1 Chron. xxvi. 1](#) (R.V.).

MIGHTY men of valour were needed for this, just as sweet singers were for the service of song. Entrance to the House of God was restricted to a privileged few. Gentiles were excluded from certain courts, and women from another. It was incumbent also to look out for those who, like the publican in the Lord's parable, might shrink from intruding, and encourage them to enter. Doorkeepers had to combine many qualities, which would be of the greatest service if they could be repeated in each church and chapel of our great cities, for welcoming old and young.

But chiefly we are concerned with the temple of the heart. We surely need the doorkeeper there, for in the history of the inner life there is so much going and coming; such troops of thoughts pour into the shrine of the soul, and pour out. And often, in the crowd, disloyal and evil thoughts intrude, which, before we know it, introduce a sense of distance and alienation from God, as though a cloud had veiled the shining of the Shekinah. Whenever the sky is overcast within, we should question whether some traitor, some excommunicate, has entered. Our native wit is not quick enough to detect, and our strength not mighty enough to withstand, the entrance of all these evil things. Hence the necessity not only to live in the Spirit, but to walk in the Spirit, i. e., to submit everything to the Spirit's scrutiny.

It is necessary also that strict supervision strong be exercised over those who unite with the visible Church, lest her holiness become diluted, and her fences broken down. Nothing is more important than the function of doorkeeping for the Church's purity.

All these were the rulers of the substance which was King David's. [1 Chron. xxvii. 31.](#)

THERE was great variety in office and gift. He who cared for the work of the field could not have known how to care for the flocks. The overseer of olive-yard and vineyard would have been a poor hand with the camels and asses. One sort of talent was needed for the herds, and another for the wine cellars; and yet there was unity in the common service of the king. We are reminded of the words of the Apostle, describing the variety in unity which must obtain in every healthy church: "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit; diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord; diversities of operations, but the same God."

Each of these different men had his distinct sphere for which he was doubtless specially qualified; and it was his duty — not to be jealous of others, nor eager to imitate them, but — to be faithful in his own province. How much happier we should all be if we recognised our specific work in God's house, and kept to it, being content to serve the King as He has seen fit to determine, rendering Him the produce in due season.

How great an error it would have been had any of these begun to account the produce of cattle or ground as his own! He had nothing that he had not received, and whatever he controlled had been entrusted to his care for the emolument and of his sovereign. Yet, how few of us that we are put in business with God's capital, for God's use. We take all and give Him a percentage, instead of using all for Him and keeping a percentage for ourselves. In this we rob God, and greatly err. We must acknowledge that both we and all we possess belong to Him.

The Lord God, even my God, . . will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. 1 Chron. xxviii. 20.

IT is very comforting to take these words to our hearts; especially when we connect them with the foregoing ones about the pattern, and apply the whole passage to the temple-building of our own lives. For each of us, too, there is a pattern, an ideal, a design, based on the possibilities which God sees to be within our reach; for each, too, there is abundance of stored provision; but we are not always strong to do. In Jesus there is the complete ideal of human life; of the Child at Nazareth; of the Servant in the workshop; of the Lover in his affection for his church; of the Friend, the Sufferer, the Patriot, the Saviour. Go forth and imitate Him!

Sometimes our heart and flesh fail us in the mid-passage of life. Once the energy and vigour of youth promised to sustain and carry us to the end of life, without fear or failure; but these die down, and we wonder how the remainder of the life-plan can be fulfilled. And the one sufficient answer is — God. He who helped our fathers to the very end will help us; He who did not fail or forsake them, will never leave nor forsake *us*, until *all* the work of life which He has planned, is finished.

It is probable that you will do better and more enduring work henceforth than you have ever done in the heyday and plenitude of youthful power, if you let God work all through you to his own glory. You have no need for despondency, God is sufficient. Oh to write this down on the tablets of the heart — God is; God is here ; God is all-sufficient; God has begun and will finish! God has promised that he will never leave nor forsake us; therefore we may boldly say, "God is my helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

Our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is no abiding. [1 Chron. xxix. 15.](#) (R.V.).

ALL life has been compared to the shadow of a smoke-wreath; a gesture in the invisible air; a hieroglyph traced for an instant on the sand, and effaced a moment after by a breath of wind; an air-bubble vanishing on the river. Pilgrims and sojourners, as were all our fathers — such is the universal confession. But even such may do a work that will last for ages. David and the men of his time, though transitory their stay on our planet, left behind them a standing evidence that they had been here.

Our life is nothing, but it may be divine: our days are as a breath, but they may affect unborn generations: the tent of the body is laid aside, but the soul, which had dwelt in it, is immortal in its touch: it leaves traces of its own immortality behind in its works, and it lives in them. In one sense, the answer to the ancient prayer is certain: "Establish Thou the works of our hands upon us." But we may well ask, that they may be such that we shall have no need to be ashamed of.

But, for this, God must live mightily within us. Abide in Me, said our Lord. . . . I have appointed you that ye may bring forth fruit, and that your fruit may abide. It is impossible to be in true union with Christ without feeling the pulse of his glorious life; and where it enters like a tidal river, it can have but one result — it must manifest itself in fruit. It is only in proportion as our works are done in God, and God permeates our works, that they become sources of enduring blessing to coming time. Pilgrims though we be, yet, if our lives are spent before Him, we may build temples which will outlast the wreck of matter.

I will give thee riches. [2 Chron. i. 11, 12.](#)

SOLOMON had chosen wisdom and knowledge that he might honour God in the sight of his people. And in return God honoured him, and supplemented his choice with abundant wealth.

This reminds one of the constant teaching of Jesus. He who seeks his life loses it; but to lose it is to save it in the best and deepest sense. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added.

The conception of life given in the Bible differs by a whole heaven from the maxims and practices of some good and earnest people. Their notion is that they must work for their living, "keep the wolf from the door," educate their children for successfully meeting the demands of life. These objects are legitimate; but they were never meant by God to be the supreme aim of his servants.

His object in our creation, redemption, and regeneration, was that we might serve his redemptive purposes in the world, manifest his character, do his will, win souls for his kingdom, administer the gifts with which He had entrusted us. He asks us to rise to this high calling, and give our whole life to its realization. He will be responsible for all else. It is surely his will that we should give ourselves to useful trades, and fill our days with honest toil; but the main purpose should ever be his glory, and the exemplification in word and act of his holy character. If we ask for wisdom to do this well, we shall get all else into the bargain. God is a being of perfect honour and integrity. And if we dare to make his service the main end of life, we shall find that no good thing will fail. He paves the streets of heaven with gold, and will not withhold it from his children, if they really need.

Because the Lord loveth His people, He hath made thee King over them. [2 Chron. ii. 11](#)(R.V.).

HOW truly might these words be addressed to our blessed Lord! Because God loved the world, He gave his only-begotten Son, his well-beloved, to be both Prince and Saviour. And it is in knowing, loving, and serving Him that we can realize our supreme blessedness.

God's loving appointment in making Jesus King will be apparent when we remember how beautiful He is in his personal character; how closely He is identified with our nature; the might of his arm with which He shields, the patience wherewith He bears, the redemption which He has wrought out and brought in for all who believe. What could God's love have done better to approve itself?

Is He your King? Never till He is so, will you know the fulness of God's love. Those who question or refuse his authority are always in doubt about the love of God to themselves and to the world. Those, on the other hand, who acknowledge his claims, and crown Him as King, suddenly find themselves admitted to a standpoint of vision in which doubts and disputations vanish, and the secret love of God is unfolded. Then they experience the wise and gentle tendance of the Divine love in its most entrancing characteristics. All is love where Jesus reigns.

Nothing is more indicative of God's benevolence than his incessant appeal to men to make Jesus King. The demand may sometimes involve severe agony and suffering for those who have acknowledged other lords too long; but God persists in his demand, because only in serving Jesus can the human heart be truly blessed.

"Go, spread your trophies at his feet,
And crown Him Lord of all!"

He set up the pillars before the Temple, . . . Jachin and Boaz. 2 Chron. iii. 17.

THE meaning of these names is significant — *He shall establish*, and *In it is strength*. Each speaks of Him of whom the whole temple was a type. The Lord Jesus has established the work of redemption so that it shall never be removed; has established the covenant, ordered in all things and sure; has established his Church, so that the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it; has established us before the face of his Father for evermore.

There is much in the New Testament about the *established* life. It is the desire of Peter that the scattered saints should be perfected, established, and strengthened. Paul desires to see the Roman Christians, that he may impart some spiritual gift so that they may be established: he desires that the Colossians may be built up in Christ, and established in the faith. The Epistle to the Hebrews says that it is good for the heart to be established with grace. Let us ask that Jesus should establish us in the Divine life, rooting and grounding us in love and faith, so that we may not be moved away from the Gospel, but abound therein with thanksgiving.

It is only as we abide in Jesus, that we shall become steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding.

But Christ is also our *strong* Helper. We have no strength of our own; but He is strong; and in Him we have righteousness and strength. Let us make our refuge in Him, as the conies, who are a feeble folk, do in the rock. They who abide in Jesus derive from Him fresh supplies of strength for each moment's need. They hear Him saying, "Fear not, I will strengthen, yea, I will help thee"; and they learn to say with Paul: "I can do all things in Christ that strengtheneth me."

The Weight could not be found out. [2 Chron. iv. 18.](#)

THIS was as it should be. There was no attempt to keep an accurate account of what was given to the service of God. Even Solomon's left hand did not know what his right hand did. There is a tendency in all of us to keep a strict account of what we give to God. We note it down in our ledgers; we rigorously observe the compact into which we have entered with Him; but the loftiest form of devotion overleaps such calculation.

This liberality of the people reminds us of Mary's. She never thought of the great cost of the precious spikenard which she broke over the Master's person. It was her joy to give her all; and it was only when Judas came on the scene, that we learn how many hundred pence it was worth. Thus the churches of Macedonia abounded from their deep poverty unto the riches of their liberality, so that, beyond their power, they gave to the cause of God.

This lavish generosity is the reflection of God's. There is no measure in his bounty. It is heaped up, pressed down, and running over. He never says, I will give up to a certain amount, and hold my hand; but He continues to give like the overflowings of the river of Egypt, or the abundance of the spring flowers, which cover the earth as with a carpet. Ah, what a God is ours, who loves with a love that passeth knowledge; and when He gives, exceeds abundance, however much we may have asked or thought. How truly may we say with the psalmist, "Many, Lord my God, are the wonderful works that Thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward. They cannot be reckoned up in order unto Thee; if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered."

Then the house was filled with a Cloud. [2 Chron. v. 13.](#)

THIS was the bright Shekinah cloud, the symbol of the Divine Presence, which had shone for Moses in the bush, and led the march through the desert. It was as though God had found a rest. And as it settled upon the Most Holy Place, it was as though God said, This is my rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it.

The Most Holy Place is the symbol of our spirit, meant to be the abiding-place and home of God; and shall we not invite the blessed Shekinah cloud to enter thither, addressing it in the words of the Psalm, "Arise, Lord, into thy resting-place, Thou and the ark of thy strength." Because where He comes to abide He abundantly blesses the provision, and satisfies the poor with bread; He clothes his priests with salvation, and makes his saints shout aloud for joy; He erects the horn of strength and prepares the lamp of light. What were the conditions of this incoming? —

First, UNITY.- "The trumpeters and singers were as *one*." We must put away strife, divisions, variance, and evil-speaking. Our heart and life must be full of love. When the disciples were with one accord, in one place, the Spirit descended.

Second, HEARTINESS. — "They lifted up their voice." There was every symptom of sincerity and fervour.

Third, THANKSGIVING AND PRAISE. — "They praised the Lord, saying, He is good, for his mercy endureth for ever." No refrain occurs oftener in the Bible than this. It is an exquisite expression of the heart's joy and rest in God. Let us sing it in our darkest, as well as gladdest hours, full of trust, thanksgiving, and praise.

When Thou teachest them the good way wherein they should walk. [2 Chron. vi. 27](#) (R.V.).

THIS sentence is exactly parallel with the previous one, *When Thou dost afflict them*. The obvious meaning then is, that God sometimes taught Israel the good way wherein they should walk, by afflicting them and shutting up the heaven so that there was no rain. This was notably the case in the days of Elijah. Possibly, these words were in his heart, when he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and it rained not for the space of three years and six months. Perhaps the prophet felt that in no other way could the people be brought back to their senses, and reconciled to God, except by learning the futility of idol-worship. So he asked God to teach them the good way, by shutting up the bad one.

What a lesson for ourselves: God often teaches us by bitter disappointment and pain. Our familiar paths are barricaded by thorns, our familiar hidingplaces are blocked up, our fountains are poisoned, and all our pleasant things are laid waste. We sometimes suppose that this is in wrath; may it not rather be in love? God is reaching us the good by us the evil; is urging us to tread in the pleasant ways of wisdom, by allowing us to prove the sharp flints and thorns of transgression. Then Ephraim bemoans himself thus: Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a calf unaccustomed to the yoke: turn Thou me, and I shall be turned. Then the soul cries, I will go and return to my first husband, for then was it better with me than now.

Sit in God's school, and learn from his Word and Spirit, that He may not be compelled to have recourse to such severe measures as these. Why shouldst thou be afflicted, when He is willing to instruct and teach thee in the way that thou shouldst go!

The fire came down from Heaven, and consumed the Burnt-Offering. [2 Chron. vii. 1.](#)

IT was a very gracious and immediate response to the prayer of King and people. If we make room for God, He always comes and fills. If we seek Him, He is instantly with us. Directly the soul confesses, it is forgiven; or consecrates itself, it is accepted; or claims deliverance from the power of sin, it is cleansed. Do you really want the Lord to come to you? His glory has even now begun to shine in on you, to grow and enlighten you for evermore.

The fire stands for the *Divine Presence*. Oh to have always a consciousness of it! Nothing would so soon arrest and destroy the impurity and evil within; as sunshine does fungus-growth. We are told that the fire was to be kept burning on the altar: it was never to go out. Thus, we should always perpetuate and practise the presence of God, feeding the fire with the fuel of prayer and meditation.

Fire also stands for the *Divine Purity*. As the Plague of London was stamped out by the Great Fire which destroyed the nests where it had bred: and as the furnace rids the ore of dross — so the Holy Spirit in thy heart and mine is a guarantee of holiness and righteousness all our days.

Fire also stands for *Divine Fellowship*. It consumed that part of the offering which was placed on the altar; and it seemed as if the Divine nature was therefore feeding upon the sacrifice, whilst the remainder of it was consumed by the offerer. Thus, also, we have communion with God, as we eat the bread and drink the wine in the Lord's Supper. We feed on Christ in adoration, faith, and identification. God feeds on the completeness of Christ's obedience, and the glory of his character. Thus we have fellowship with the Father and the Son, by the Holy Ghost.

The places are holy, whereunto the Ark of God hath come. [2 Chron. viii. 11.](#)

ON this account Solomon said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David, king of Israel. What a fatal admission! She was the daughter of Pharaoh, and therefore it was no doubt considered a splendid match for the young king; and yet she could not dwell within the precincts of the old city of David, hallowed by the presence of the Ark. "He brought her out of the city of David, into the house that he had built for her." So from the very outset there was division of interests, making way no doubt for much of the waywardness of Solomon's character in after life, so that we are told "his wives turned away his heart."

One of the first questions that youth and maiden should put in considering the question of marriage is, whether there can be perfect sympathy in the best and deepest things; for how can two walk together except they be agreed?

The blessedness of the marriage tie depends on whether the twain are one in spirit, in a common love for Christ, and endeavour for his glory. Nothing is more terrible than when either admits in the secrecy of the heart, concerning the other, My husband or my wife cannot accompany me into the holy places where I was reared, and in which my best life finds its home.

All friendship should follow the same law. We must abide together in the secret place of the Most High, if our friends and we are to be friends indeed. All places may be made holy where the Ark of God's covenant comes. Where it goes, love may safely follow; but woe to the love that cannot! Its inability proves its lack of elements of permanence and perfect satisfaction.

She came to prove Solomon with hard questions. [2 Chron. ix. 1.](#)

SHE came to the right place, for Solomon passed all the kings of the earth in wisdom; and all the kings of the earth sought his presence, to hear the wisdom that God had put into his heart. Bring your hard questions to Christ; He is greater than Solomon. To Him is given riches and wisdom, and He is made unto us wisdom. Before the touch of his light the darkest perplexities must resolve themselves. Though He speak no audible word, the hardest questions are answered to the eyes and ears

of such as wait before Him.

She came in the *right spirit*, bringing him gold and spices and precious stones. Those who would get from Christ must be willing to give to Him. There must be a reciprocity; and if we hope to receive from Him from those infinite stores of which He has the key, we must count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, and must be prepared to count them as refuse if only we may win Him.

She came to a *right conclusion*. He answered all her questions, and she returned congratulating his servants and blessing God. To each of us life is full of perplexities, to which we can find no solution, however much we strain our eyes and weary our minds. But away there in the light Christ stands, with the perfect plan of every maze in his possession, with a key for every riddle, and solution for every enigma. Wait patiently. Each tough knot will be untied; and there will come into our hearts a radiancy, a bounding joy like that with which the Queen of Sheba turned to go to her own home. The half of the greatness of thy wisdom, Word of God can never be told!

For it was brought about of God. [2 Chron. x. 15](#) (R.V.).

THIS revolt must have seemed to be the result of an unfortunate mistake on the part of the ill-advised young king. He and the young men that gathered around him thought that the best way of ruling people was by showing a strong hand, and adopting a policy of noncompliance with their very natural requests. But as the result, the Ten Tribes, never very closely bound to David's line, sprang away from it, leaving, as Ahijah had foretold, only two out of the twelve pieces of the rent garment. Here, however, a deeper explanation is given: "It was brought about of God." It seemed to be altogether a piece of human folly and passion; but now we are suddenly brought into the presence of God, and told that beneath the plottings and plannings of man He was carrying out his eternal purpose.

To detect this Divine purpose lying beneath the cross-currents of human affairs is the prerogative of the saints. In a recent book, the Duke of Argyll has argued from the *purpose-iveness* of nature. With as much certainty we may apply that word to history, politics, the course of current events. All is under law. God doeth according to his will among the armies of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Without contravening the action of man's free choice He carries out his great designs and works his sovereign will. Let us trust in this Almighty Providence, which underlies all events and catastrophes, and pursues its beneficent objects undeterred by our sins. He makes the wrath of man to praise Him, and weaves the malignant work of Satan into his plans.

Such as set their hearts to seek the Lord God of Israel came to Jerusalem. [2 Chron. xi. 16.](#)

ALL the tribes were represented in those great convocations around the Temple and Ark of God. The territory of the northern tribes was now under Jeroboam; the gulf between the two kingdoms was marked and distinct. Everything was done by the son of Nebat to make it difficult for his people to cross the frontier; but their spiritual affinities prevailed. They were stronger than the antipathy which Rehoboam's haughty behaviour had excited; stronger than the fear of incurring odium with their own king; stronger than the inconvenience of the long journey. In spite of everything, those whose hearts were set on seeking the Lord God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice to the Lord God of their fathers.

Does not this foreshadow the unity of the Church of Christ? Territorial distinctions, the risk of incurring disfavour, the necessity of making a sacrifice — these things are as nothing compared with the attraction of our common Lord. Amid wide disunion and disparity of every kind, there is one mighty bond which draws believers of every nation, kindred, tribe, and people together. Each morning we all ascend the steps of the same temple of prayer; each evening we join in one great hymn of praise; at each Lord's Supper we sit at the same table. Eating of one Bread, we know that we are one Loaf; drinking of one Cup, we profess our indebtedness to the same precious Blood for our hope and ground of acceptance ([1 Cor. x. 17](#), R.V., *marg.*).

We must set our hearts, if we desire to execute any great purpose in our life: otherwise we shall be daunted and checkmated by the strong opposition of men and things.

He did evil, because he prepared not his heart to seek the Lord. [2 Chron. xii. 14.](#)

IN the margin of the A.V. for *prepared* the alternative rendering *fixed* is suggested. The R.V. gives *set*, "he set not his heart to seek the Lord." This is very true of all of us. Before temptation comes we almost always have a warning of some kind. The barometer falls; the sea birds come in to the shore; the leaves of the trees are bent back. The Spirit of God contrives to give the soul some signal that at any moment it may expect an assault. The question always is at such a time, Is the heart set on seeking and doing the will of God? If it be, if without reserve the whole nature is determined to do God's will at any cost, there is no fear of the enemy effecting an entrance. All day the thunder of its artillery may boom around, but from every side the foe will be repelled, until presently the storm will roll far down the wind.

If, on the other hand, there is any vacillation; if, whilst ostensibly avowing our determination to do the right thing, we secretly whisper in our deepest consciousness that we intend to go as far as we can in self-indulgence, and would be almost thankful if circumstances compelled us to yield — we are almost certain to fall. The will must be whole in its resolves; the heart must be consecrated in its most secret determinations; no traitor may be harboured, who may open the postern gate. Oh to say with David, "My heart is fixed, God, my heart is fixed"! But this steadfastness is one of those preparations of the heart which can only be obtained through the gracious indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Hence we pray with David, "Renew a steadfast spirit within me." And while we pray, we must never forget our Lord's command to watch also.

Behold, the battle was before and behind. **2 Chron. xiii. 14.**

ABIJAH'S address is full of true and noble utterances, especially when he describes God as being the Captain of the Host; and this spirit soon permeated his people, so that when the battle was sorest, and they were hemmed in by their foes, it was natural for them to turn to the Lord, and for the priests to give a blast on the trumpets, like that with which the new moon and the solemn feasts were inaugurated.

The point for us to remember is that our enemies may shut us in on all sides, preventing reinforce-

ments from north, south, east, and west; but no earthly power can ever shut off God from above us. The way upwards is always kept clear; the ladder which links the beleaguered soul with God and heaven can never be blocked, except by transgression and sin.

The Priest is always with thee, child of God. His help is always at hand. Neither death, nor life, nor height, nor depth, nor principalities, nor powers, can ever separate thee from the down-coming of God's love.

The battle is often before and behind. From behind come memories of past failure, the consequences of mistakes, the misunderstandings which have alienated us from others, and made it difficult for us to live as we would; on the other hand perplexities and anxieties seem to bar our future path. But when the battle is before and behind, remember that God besets his people behind and before, and covers them with his hand. The invisible film of his protection makes the soul invulnerable. The life that is hid with Christ in God is beyond the reach of harm.

Lord, there is none beside Thee to help. [2 Chron. xiv. 11](#) (R.V.)

REMINDE God of his entire responsibility. — "There is none beside thee to help." The odds against Asa were enormous. There were a million of men in arms against him, beside three hundred chariots. It seemed impossible to hold his own against that vast multitude. There were no allies who would come to his help: his only hope therefore was in God. There was none beside to help. It may be that your difficulties have been allowed to come to so alarming a pitch that you may be compelled to renounce all creature aid, to which in lesser trials you have had recourse, and cast yourself back on your Almighty Friend.

Put God between yourself and the foe. — To Asa's faith, Jehovah seemed to stand between the might of Zerah and himself, as one who had no strength. Nor was he mistaken. We are told that the Ethiopians were destroyed before the Lord and *before his host*, as though celestial combatants flung themselves against the foe in Israel's behalf, and put the large host to rout, so that Israel had only to follow up and gather the spoil. Our God is Jehovah of Hosts, who can summon unexpected reinforcements at any moment to the aid of his people. Believe that He is there between you and your difficulty, and what baffles you will flee before Him, as clouds before the gale.

Identify your cause with his. — "In thy name are we come. . . . Let not man prevail against Thee." It is a great matter when a small State is so identified with a strong European power, as that an insult to one of its officials is deemed a *casus belli* by the more powerful Government; and whenever we are so delivered from selfish aims, as to be able to show that our cause and God's are one, we are invincible.

They entered into a covenant to seek the Lord God of their fathers. [2 Chron. xv. 12.](#)

WE hear but little talk in the present day of the covenant, the mention of which was dear to God's people of olden time. There is this difference between *it* and the covenants which we make with God. *That* is permanent, *these* evanescent. That is founded upon the oath and promise of God; these on the resolutions and endeavours of man. That is full of promises of what God will be and do; these recount what we are prepared to sacrifice and suffer. And though we sign them with blood drawn from our veins, they will disappoint and fail.

Do not think too much of entering into and keeping a covenant with God; but remember that the Lord Jesus, on our behalf, has entered into covenant relation with the Father, and the Father with us in Him. This is the new covenant. It is drawn out at length in [Hebrews viii.](#) Very little is said about our side, but it is full to overflowing of God's. Nothing is said of our fidelity to our obligations, because man has been too often weighed in the balances and found wanting; and because the Lord Jesus Christ, as our representative, has already fulfilled all the conditions of obedience and devotion on which its provisions depend. He has also graciously undertaken to realize those conditions by the Holy Spirit in us.

Every time we put to our lips the cup of the new covenant, we humbly remind God of all He has promised, and ask Him to do as He has said. At the same time we may confidently ask the great Surety of the covenant to accomplish in us such a mind as may love and keep our Father's law. And what He did for our fathers, who were naturally just such as we are, He will certainly do for us.

To show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. [2 Chron. xvi. 9.](#)

THE emphasis is clearly on the word *perfect*. That was the point between Hanani the seer and Asa the king. Asa's mistake and sin lay in his resorting to Benhadad, king of Syria, as an ally against Baasha. Evidently he did not perfectly trust the delivering power of God; and in this failure of his faith, he forfeited the all-sufficient help which would have more than availed. As the seer said very truly, simple trust in God had brought deliverance from the Ethiopians and Lubim, though they were a much huger host than Baasha's; and the same attitude in respect of Baasha would have secured a like result. God was only awaiting the appeal of Asa's faith, to show Himself strong. What a mistake to send to Syria!

Now, dear reader, this is very pertinent for your life and mine. We often complain that we are bereft of help, and send off for Benhadad. And all the while the eyes of the Lord are looking pitifully and longingly at us. Nothing would give Him greater pleasure than to show Himself strong on our behalf. This, however, He cannot do until renouncing all other confidants and helpers, our heart is perfect in the simplicity and frankness of its faith. What an exquisite thought is suggested by the allusion to the eyes of the Lord running to and fro throughout the whole earth! At a glance He takes in our position; not a sorrow, trial, or temptation visits us without exciting his notice and loving sympathy. In all the whole wide earth there is not one spot so lonely, one heart so darkened, as to escape those eyes. Oh for the perfect confidence which will allow Him to act! It is for lack of this that we remain unhelped, and spend our days in the midst of wars and tumults.

His heart was lifted up in the ways of the Lord. [2 Chron. xvii. 6.](#)

SURSUM corda! Lift up your hearts! How beautiful is this ejaculation in the Communion Service of the Church of England, and the response, "We lift them up unto the Lord." I never hear it without the thrill of a holy impulse passing through me. It is possible, and it is meet and right, to lift up our hearts from the sordid cares and pressing responsibilities of daily life, into the calm, serene presence of God our Father.

Lift up your heart to God, as a child its face to be kissed. Lift it up free from mistrust and sinful stain, and unkind feeling towards any. Lift it up in holy joy and inspiration. Lift it up as a censer filled with the hot coals, from which sweet fragrance exhales. And God will bend down to lift it higher, and fill it with his peace and joy and purity.

In hours of depression look up, be lifted. *Sursum corda!* When the foe is pressing you most severely, look up, your redemption draweth nigh. When the river has to be crossed, when the last farewell must be said, when the flesh fails, let your mind and heart thither ascend, and there continually dwell where Jesus has entered as your Forerunner.

If you would lift up your heart, you must be in the ways of the Lord, as the good Jehoshaphat. You must seek the Lord God, and walk in his commandments. You must take away the high places and groves of idolatry and impurity. Beware of the world's birdlime! Shake yourself from the bands and bonds that would detain you. Oh, heart of mine, why is thy flight so low? Lift thyself up and sit down with Christ in the heavenly places! "Unto Thee, Lord, do I lift up my soul. Let not mine enemies triumph over me!"

I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil. [2 Chron. xviii. 7.](#)

THIS was a very naive confession. Of course, Micaiah could not speak good of Ahab, whose life was diametrically opposed to all that was God-like and holy. Micaiah had no animosity towards the king of Israel; it was not a personal matter with him. He simply read from the page of the future as God opened it to his eyes, and in which the out-working of the king's evil life was disclosed in gloomy characters. It was as absurd to hate him because he read such dark lessons from the inevitable future, as for a householder to shoot his dog, that bays all night, to warn his master against the burglar engaged in rifling his home.

The Bible, the pastor, the whole Church of God, are hated by worldlings for the same reason, because they cannot speak hopefully of their future. It is as though a card-playing crew were to hate the watchman who told them that the course of their vessel was straight for the surf and rocks of the shore. If men will persist in violating God's law, in breaking through the hedge of thorns, and in pursuing their own wild ways, they cannot possibly expect the blessedness of the Beatitudes. However, their hatred against those who warn them is really directed towards God. They are indignant that they cannot have their way; their proud spirit would like to overturn the very order of the universe rather than that it should be thwarted. They cannot endure the contrast between God's children and themselves. Do not be surprised if the world hate you. It shows that you are no more of the world than your Master was. Jesus said: "If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also."

Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? [2 Chron. xix. 2.](#)

THIS looks back to xviii. 1, where we learn that Jehoshaphat, though he had riches and honour in abundance, joined affinity with Ahab. Riches and abundance are dangerous things. They usually weaken our character, and incline us to worldly alliances; and it was to their subtle and pernicious influences that Jehoshaphat fell a victim. Ah! what a fall it was to hear him saying, "I am as thou art, and my people as thy people." Well might Jehu take up the role which his father had filled before Asa, and protest. But let us seriously question whether, though there are good things found in us, we may not be falling into the same mistake, and sin. Are there not ways in which we say to men of the world, with whom we mix, "I am as thou art"?

There is a great tendency in the present day to boast in the closeness with which we can approach the world without injury. We join in the social life, read the same books, go to the same amusements, talk of the same themes; and it is almost impossible in a drawing-room to tell the difference between the Jehoshaphats and the Ahabs. So also, in our methods of doing good. The real difficulty lies away back in our want of engagedness with Christ. It is of little use to find fault with the outward, as long as the heart is wayward. Love to the Lord Jesus is our only safeguard. The love of Christ must constrain us. Personal attachment to Christ will wean us away from this close identification with the world. But if we persist in identifying ourselves with the world, which God has doomed, we must not be surprised to find that wrath is on us from the Lord: and He will chasten us for love's sake.

He appointed singers unto the Lord, that should praise the beauty of holiness. [2 Chron. xx. 21.](#)

DOST thou praise the beauty of holiness? Is holiness beautiful to thee? Art thou in love with it as it is presented in the glorious Lord? Canst thou turn from the noise and anxiety of life's battle to dwell on the loveliness of God and of the devout life, and to praise Him whose mercy endureth for ever? It is a rare accomplishment, acquired only through the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. In each of us there should be the priest-side of character as well as the warrior: the love for what is beautiful in holiness as well as for the strong and active in service.

But the special characteristic of this battle was that the good king put the singers in the forefront of the army, and praised for a victory which was only assured to him by faith. Yet so sure was he of it, that he could praise before he entered into the battle.

There is much to help us here in our daily combat for God and truth. Let us fill the morning hour with holy song, in the heart, if not with the voice; let a psalm or hymn be part of the daily reading; let there be the confidence that God is going to bless, which cannot restrain its jubilant expression. So in all prayer, wait on God till you feel that you can praise Him for what you have asked Him to bestow.

When they began to praise, the Lord did all the rest. Before the onset of his Divine reinforcements the enemy fled. His people had but to gather spoil, and then the praise which had anticipated the battle was consummated as they returned, in the valley of blessing.

'There's a song in the valley of blessing so sweet,
And angels would fain join the strain,
As with rapturous praises we bow at his feet,
Crying. 'Worthy the Lamb that was slain!'

The same time also did Libnah rebuild from under his hand. [2 Chron. xxi. 10.](#)

AS long as the kings of Judah remained true to their allegiance to God they were able to keep in subjection the surrounding nations; but just so soon as they revolted from God these peoples revolted from them. It was as though power descended into them from the source of all power; and when the link between themselves and God was broken, that between them and their subordinates was broken also.

This applies very widely: *To our passions.* — If they master you, rebelling against and revolting from your hand, it is because there is some flaw in your consecration, and you have forsaken to some extent the Lord God.

To our families. — When the heads of a home are in perfect unity with each other and God, they may generally expect that their children will grow up submissive and obedient. Their authority will be recognised and honoured. Revolt in the home indicates very often some lapse in obedience and loyalty to God.

To our influence over men. — When the soul is in blessed fellowship with God, power flows into it from Him, before which strongholds are overthrown. "I am full of power by the Spirit of the Lord," said the prophet. "I am a man under authority, and have soldiers under me," said the centurion.

Give yourself entirely to Jesus. Obey Him absolutely; receive by faith from Him living power and grace; be a channel through which He may pour Himself; and you will find that men and things will fall into line at your bidding, and you shall receive power. Our Libnahs will not revolt unless we forsake the Lord God of our fathers.

Hid in the House of God. [2 Chron. xxii. 12.](#)

SAFE from Athaliah, who would have ruthlessly destroyed him if she had had an inkling of his existence, the Young Joash was reared beneath the care of Jehoiada and his wife within the precincts of the house of God. He was hidden in the secret place of the Most High, and abode under the shadow of the Almighty. There let us also live. Let us know what it is to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our life, and all this day. Let us cultivate the life which is hid with Christ in God.

It is well often to remind ourselves that we are in God, and that the firm of his environing presence is about us like a wall of thick-ribbed steel. We are in Him as the jewel in the casket; as the chick under the feathers of the hen; as the child in the warm embrace of its mother. And so long as we stay there we are invulnerable. Therefore our great enemy is continually endeavouring to allure us into the open; he knows he can do as he likes with us, if only he can induce us to venture beyond our hiding-place. Therefore, beware of any temptation to worry, to amass this world's goods, or to seek the indulgence of appetite; it is by such lures and baits that Satan seduces unwary souls from their safe hiding.

If a day in God's courts is better than a thousand, what must it be to dwell in the house of the Lord all one's days, to behold his beauty, and enquire in his temple. The rarest visions, the fairest fellowship, the most entrancing joys, the most confident outlook on life, and the hereafter, are the accompaniments of such a residence. The altar of incense, the laver of dairy cleansing, the light of the Shekinah, the holy psalm and song, the great altar of sacrifice, are familiar objects to the hidden soul.

And the city was quiet after they had slain Athaliah with the sword. [2 Chron. xxiii. 21.](#)

THIS was a great revolution, admirably planned and carried into effect. It was intolerable that such a woman as Athaliah should desecrate the throne and temple. Jehoiada, by his prudence and courage, deserved well of the entire nation in ridding the world of her presence. No half measures would have availed to meet the case.

There are times in every life when strong and strenuous action is inevitable if the cause of God is to be promoted and saved. In many of us there is a willingness to tolerate evil, rather than arouse ourselves to grasp it with a firm hand, and, if needs be, drag it up by its roots. Be strong, yea, be strong, is an injunction that has to be emphasized even to men who are greatly beloved. The easiest thing for Jehoiada would have been to shut himself up in the temple, and leave things to take their course. The noblest thing was to come forth, and boldly confront the rampant evil of his time. So God's call rings out for helpers in the great fight against sin. Its notes penetrate into the retirement of Christian homes, to noble women and devoted men, demanding that they should come forth to resist impurity, the love of strong drink, the strong tendency towards extravagance, luxury, and waste. The world is full of Athaliahs, and it is not befitting that the Jehoiadas should remain at their holy rites and services if there is a paramount need for action in the world's battlefield, in the strife against wrong.

The children of God are citizens of the New Jerusalem, but they are also certainly citizens here; and they must not stand aside from great public issues, allowing them to be decided by ungodly and wicked men.

The Spirit of God clothed itself with Zechariah the son of Jehoiada. [2 Chron. xxiv. 20](#) (R. V., marg.).

AS we put on a cloak or dress, so does the Spirit of God, as it were, hide Himself in those who surrender themselves to Him, so that it is not they who speak and act, but He within them. Have you at any time been conscious of having become the clothing of the Holy Spirit? Remember that cloth or leather must yield itself easily to the movements of its wearer, and not less pliable and supple must we be to the Spirit of God.

When the Spirit of God is thus within us, and speaks or acts for us, we may expect, as Zechariah found it, to come into collision with the entire drift and current of society around us, and to incur odium and hatred. Men do not like to be told that they cannot prosper because they have forsaken God; but we have no alternative than to witness against their sins. Does the Spirit clothe Himself with you my friend, as you anticipate the work of to-day? Are you using Him, or is He to use you? Are you seeking to clothe yourself with his power for some personal ambition, or are you desirous that He should array Himself in you, so that the glory may evidently be his? In the agony of battle, when great deeds are to be done, no one stops to think of the uniform of the soldier, but only of the might beneath it.

But for this you must be prepared to pay the cost, and be willing to cross the cherished purposes of men, as the Spirit of God by your voice or deed witnesses against them. They stoned Zechariah at the command of the king; but years after the Lord Jesus referred to it, for no faithful martyr seals his witness with his blood without some quick glance of recognition from the Master, and some record on the imperishable tablets of his heart.

The Lord is able to give thee much more than this. [2 Chron. xxv. 9.](#)

AMAZIAH had many good qualities, but he did not clearly see how impossible it was for Israel to be allied with Judah without invalidating the special Divine protection and care on which Judah had been taught to rely. We must understand that God cannot be in fellowship with us if we tolerate fellowship with the ungodly. We must choose between the two. If we can renounce all creature aid, and trust simply in the eternal God, there is no limit to the victories He will secure; but if, turning from Him, we hold out our hand toward the world, we forfeit his aid. child of God, let not the army of Israel go with thee! Do not adopt worldly policy, methods, or partnership. However strong you make yourself for the battle in alliance with these, you will fail. Indeed, God Himself will make you fall before the enemy, that you may be driven back to Himself.

But you say that you have already entered into so close an alliance that you cannot draw back. You have invested your capital, you have gone to great expenditures. Yet it will be better to forfeit these than Him. Without these aids, and with only God beside you, you will be able to rout Edom, and smite ten thousand men. Would that men knew the absolute deliverance which God will effect for those whose hearts are perfect towards Him!

The soldiers of Israel committed depredations on their way back. This was the result of the folly and sin of Amaziah's proposal. We may be forgiven, and delivered, and yet there will be afterconsequences which will follow us from some ill-considered act. Sin may be forgiven, but its secondary results are sometimes very bitter. We must expect to reap as we sow.

He was marvellously helped, till he was strong. [2 Chron. xxvi. 15, 16.](#)

GREAT and marvellous are thy works, God; that our soul knoweth quite well. Thou hast showed marvellous loving-kindness. We must sing to Thee; for Thou hast done marvellous things. It is marvelous that Thou shouldst have set thy love upon us; that Thou shouldst have watched over our interests with unwearied care; that our sins, or unbelief, or declensions, have never diverted thy love from us. "Marvellous " is the only word we can use, as we think of the condescension of the well-beloved Son to the manger-bed; of the agony and bloody-sweat; of the cross and passion — and all for us who were his enemies. But it is most marvellous of all that Thou least made us children, heirs, and joint-heirs with Christ. To think that we shall shine as the sun in thy kingdom, that we are to sit upon his throne, and be included in that circle of love and life of which the throne of God and the Lamb is the centre! Surely the marvels of thy grace will only seem the greater when eternity with its boundless ages gives us time to explore them.

The danger, however, is that we should become strong in our own conceit, and credit ourselves with the position which is due to the grace of God alone. Oh for the truly humble spirit of the little child, that we may never vaunt ourselves! The laden ship sinks in the water; the fruit-burdened bough stoops to the ground; the truest scientist is the humblest disciple. Oh to be submerged and abashed for the marvellous help of God!

God cannot trust some of us with prosperity and success, because our nature could not stand them. We must tug at the oar, instead of spreading the sail, because we have not enough ballast.

Jotham became mighty, because he ordered his ways. [2 Chron. xxvii. 6](#) (R.V.).

THERE is a lower sense in which this holds good in daily and business life. You can hardly imagine a really successful man being untidy and disorderly. Method is the law of success; and a truly holy soul is sure to be orderly. I do not remember ever meeting one who really walked with God who did not make orderliness one of the first principles of life.

The Lord Jesus would have the men sit down in rows before He broke the bread; and He wrapt together his grave-clothes before He left the sepulchre. It was, therefore, in keeping with the whole tenor of his example when the apostle prescribed that all things should be done decently and in order.

Clear handwriting, especially the direction of an envelope, to give the postman as little trouble as possible; the careful folding of our cast-off garments, to save the maids needless work; the leaving our room that we have been occupying as little disturbed in its arrangements as may be; the gathering up of luncheon fragments from the green banks, where we have sat to view the entrancing prospect; the arrangement of papers, and accounts, and magazines, so that we can readily lay our hand upon whatever is required; the adopting of mental order in prayer and conversation, and in the thinking out of plans and purposes; neatness in dress — these are all part of the right ordering of life which makes for its success and comfort, and greatly for peace in the home. They are the habits of the soul that walks before God, and which is accustomed to think of Him as seeing in secret, and as considering all our ways. In this way we may become mighty, and by being faithful in that which is least come to great charges.

They clothed all that were naked, and gave them to eat and drink. [2 Chron. xxviii. 15.](#)

A GREAT burst of generosity was here, for Israel had every reason to be incensed against Judah for the raid made on their territory. But, instead of pushing their advantage to the uttermost, they returned good for evil, and anticipated the words of the apostle, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."

Have you in your life people who have done you injury, and against whom you entertain hard thoughts? You do not injure them in return, but you cannot pray for them. So far as you can, you avoid them; you make no attempt to overcome the evil that is in them. But to act thus is to come short of Christ's standard. It is your duty, not merely to keep at a distance and give a wide berth, but by love to destroy the evil, to transform the enemy into a friend, and to create love and friendship where hostility and alienation had reigned. It is God's way, and in this we are bidden to be perfect, as our Heavenly Father is perfect.

Will you try it? Will you begin by doing kind acts to those who have harmed you? Not because as yet you feel as you would, but because it is right. Then as you dig the trench in right doing, look up to God, and He will pour into your heart the warm gush of affection. If you sincerely will his will in this matter, and act as the Good Samaritan did to the Jew, and exercise faith, God will come to your aid whilst you clothe others and minister to them, you will find their hard heart melted, and yourselves clothed with the beautiful garments of salvation, and of a meek and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is of great price.

When the burnt-offering began, the song of the Lord began also. [2 Chron. xxix. 27.](#)

THIS chapter contains a parable of the cleansing of the heart, meant to be a temple for God; but the doors of prayer are unopened, the lamps of testimony unlit, the burnt-offerings of self-sacrifice neglected; and, as the result, grass grows thick in courts which should have been trodden by the feet of Levite minstrels engaged in holy song. If ever that song is to break out again, it can only be after a thorough cleansing and renovation of the inner shrine. You tell me that you cannot sing the Lord's song; then I know you have gone into the strange land of backsliding. You acknowledge that for some time now you have taken no delight in God or his service; then I am sure that the temple is badly in need of renovation.

Cleanse the house of the Lord. Bring out all the uncleanness. By self-examination, confession, and repudiation, be clean of all the filth which has accumulated through months and years of neglect. Resume the position of entire devotion, as a prepared and sanctified soul. Offer the sin-offering for the past, and prepare the burnt-offering of entire consecration for the future. And when that is offered, when you determine to be wholly God's, lay yourself, with all the interests of your life, at the feet of Jesus, for his disposal; then the song of the Lord will begin again.

The music of your life is still, because you are out of accord with the will of God; but when by surrender and consecration there is unison, your heart will be filled with songs without words, and love like an ocean in the fulness of her strength. When the rich, selfish bachelor suddenly finds himself compelled to care for his dead brother's little children, he is startled to find that a new song has begun in his life.

The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God. [2 Chron. xxx. 18, 19.](#)

A VERY touching prayer, that opens up deep thoughts as to the progress of the true knowledge of God in Israel, and of the comparative value of heart preparation and ceremonial cleansing. Here were crowds of well-meaning people who had come from all parts of the land in answer to Hezekiah's invitation. Unaccustomed to temple usage, strangers to the temple rites, they had participated in the festivities of this great Passover without submitting first to the necessary ablutions. Their heart was prepared to seek God, they were proud of the great past, they desired to stand right with the Lord God of their fathers; but they were sadly ignorant and careless. The only thing to be done was to pray that their ignorances and negligences might be forgiven.

It is thus that Jesus pleads in heaven; and there are many that obtain mercy on the ground of his merit, because when they sin they do so ignorantly, and from want of knowledge rather than from want of heart. The devout ritualist who lays an excessive stress on outward forms; the man who has sensuous and distorted views of Christ, but sincerely desires to be accepted through Him; the soul that touches the hem of the garment as though the healing power were independent of the will-power of the Redeemer; the dying malefactor, who, in his last hours, catches at some distorted representation of Christ which is filtered through to him from the chance word of an uninstructed preacher — these are included in the fruitful pleading of the Great High Priest, who has compassion on the ignorant and on those who are out of the way. You may not understand doctrine, creed, or rite; but be sure to seek God. No splendid ceremonial nor rigorous etiquette can intercept the seeking soul.

He did it with all his heart and prospered. [2 Chron. xxxi. 21.](#)

THE man who does his business with all his heart, is sure to prosper. To put your heart into your work is like genius manipulating common materials, till their worth becomes priceless, just because of what has been put into it.

The heart stands for the emotions and affections. What the furnace is to the factory or steamship, that the heart is in the economy of our nature. It is a great thing to love our life-work, to have an aim that kindles us whenever we think of it. Those who are so happily circumstanced, cannot be sufficiently thankful. But what of those who are bound to a work which they did not choose and do not like, who find their daily toil irksome and distasteful — is there any help for them? Can they possibly learn to do such work from their hearts? Certainly: because of Him who set it, and for whom it may be done.

Love performs the most onerous duties with all its heart, if they conduce to the comfort and help of those whom it loves more than itself. Does not a mother or wife perform tasks from which the hireling would shrink? She does them with all her heart, not considering for a moment the loathsomeness and hardness of the demand. So if we look at our life-work as God-appointed; if we realize that He has fixed it for us, who determined the orbits of the stars; if we can hear the voice of Jesus saying, "Do this for Me " — there is no further thought of hardship or distaste. Remember to do all your life-work for Jesus; do all in his name and for his glory; ask Him to fill your heart with submissive, loyal obedience, and you will find that when you introduce the personal element of Christ-service into the meanest acts, they will glisten like a piece of gold-tapestry.

Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah, prayed and cried to heaven. [2 Chron. xxxii. 20.](#)

IT was the indignity done to Jehovah that stirred these two holy men to the heart. Not that their lives, and the lives of their people, and the beautiful holy city, were in danger; but that Sennacherib spake against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth, which were the work of the hands of man. Oh that we were possessed with a similar zeal for God, so that we might look at sin as it affects Him, and lament over the awful wrongs which are continually being perpetrated against his holy, loving nature! What an argument this would give us in prayer!

This constitutes a special reason why we should plead for a revival of religion throughout our land. Men speak and act so shamelessly, as though God had abdicated his throne, and was hardly to be taken account of. They sin against Him with so high a hand, and treat his laws with so much contumely. Are there no Hezekiahs and Isaiahs who will pray and cry to the God of our fathers to do again the great works He did in their days, and in the old time before?

Then the Lord would save us, and guide us on every side (22). There never was a more conspicuous and glorious deliverance than when the angel of God wrought for Israel against Assyria. The Lord became a place of broad rivers and streams across which the enemy could not pass. As the mother bird settling down on her nest, He covered the city with his outspread wings. And the rich spoils of the foe were left for the beleagured garrison. Pray on, beloved; the Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King ; He will save us.

When he was in affliction, he besought the Lord his God. [2 Chron. xxxiii. 12.](#)

SO long as this story stands on the page of revelation, no sinner need despair of mercy. There was hardly a sin possible to man that Manasseh did not commit. "He did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, like unto the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel." And he made his people do worse than the heathen.

Then came awful sorrow. Bound in fetters, exposed to consummate cruelty and disgrace, he was carried to Babylon, and thrust into the dungeons, where other captive princes were immured, with little chance of liberation or permission to revisit his native land. But there the Spirit of God did his work. He humbled himself greatly, and prayed. What tears, and cries, and bursts of heart-broken penitence, were his! How those walls were saturated with the breath of confession, and those stone floors indented by his kneeling at perpetual prayer! And God came near to his low dungeon, and graciously heard his supplication, and brought him back again.

Yes, and He will do as much for you. The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from *all* sin; the grace of God is exceedingly abundant with faith and love; all sins and blasphemies may be forgiven to the sons of men. Turn to Him with brokenness of soul, and He will not only forgive, but bring you again; and give you, as He did Manasseh, an opportunity of undoing some of those evil things which have marred your past. For the rest, it is good not to wait for affliction to stir us up to seek God, but to abide in Him for love's dear sake.

I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord. [2 Chron. xxxiv. 15, 18.](#)

IT is supposed that this was the Book of Deuteronomy; though we have no sympathy whatever with a modern notion with respect to its discovery. In our judgment that book is rightly ascribed to Moses. Apparently, however, it had long been missing, and the young king was filled with horror when he heard the list of evils that were associated with apostasy. "He rent his clothes."

We should read the Bible with a particular application to the days in which we live. It is well enough to accept its statements as being generally true and credible; but it is better to realize their pertinence to ourselves and our circumstances. The book of the law had been sadly neglected in the years preceding Josiah's accession; and through the neglect of God's Word the people had become indifferent to his commands, and deaf to the appeals of his prophets. Josiah turned the lantern on the evils of his time, and saw how God was feeling with respect to them.

The Bible is a book for all time. What it said, it says. What it was, it is. You tell me it was written so many centuries ago; but I reply the ink is still wet on its immortal pages. They have been read and pondered by generations; but the light of its eye is not dim, nor its natural force abated. Sin is the same, man the same, God the same, in all ages. And the Bible's claim to be God's Word is substantiated by the fact that it is possessed of living power, and of the same perennial freshness as the sun, or the spring, or the ocean, or the faces of the little children. Would that we might daily read it as we read the newspaper, damp from the press, realizing that it is our Father's great message for the life of every day!

Prepare. [2 Chron. xxxv. 4, 6, 10, 14, 15, 16.](#)

NO great court function can be carried through successfully, without careful preparation. And Josiah's passover was so vast and rare a success because of the large amount of previous preparation, as is described in this chapter. The priests and Levites were prepared by careful washings and ceremonial rites. The course of the sacrifices was ordered according to the law of Moses. The routine of sacred song and praise was also provided for. Nothing was left to haphazard or chance.

We are taught to rely on the promptings and inspirations of the Holy Spirit; and it is certain that He would use us more on special errands, if we were to trust and obey Him better. But these extraordinary ministries should not lead us to a life of haphazard. We should prepare ourselves for service so far as we may, laying our plans, anticipating the calls and exigencies of coming days, and preparing for the demand which almost certainly will be made on us. We may have to give our special words and addresses and arrangements to the winds; but we shall always need that preparedness of heart which is necessary for those who are to be used of God.

Remember what is said of the vessels that were purged from uncleanness, sanctified, meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work. Be always in your own place, clean so far as you can be, filled with the Holy Ghost, with the handle of your life turned towards the Master's hand, that at any moment He may take hold of you, and use you for his holy service. By the diligent study of his Word, as well as by earnest prayer and waiting upon God, you will be prepared to do his will.

Rising up betimes. [2 Chron. xxxvi. 15.](#)

WHAT a touching and graphic phrase! How did God yearn over that sinful and rebellious city! Sending his messengers, "rising up betimes, and sending" — like a man who has had a sleepless night of anxiety for his friend or child, and rises with the dawn to send a servant on a mission of inquiry, or a message of love. How eager God is for men's salvation!

From God's eagerness, may we not learn a lesson of anxiety for the souls of men? We do not long after them enough, or rise betimes to urge them to repent. Did we realize what heaven is, or hell, what men are missing or incurring, what our duty is, as saved ourselves, we should rise up betimes to seek their eternal interests.

But if God rises betimes to seek men, should they not do the same to seek Him? Think you not, that when Adam heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden at morning prime, he would be up and away to meet Him on the upland lawns of Paradise? Can we wonder that our Master would rise up a great while before day, to meet his Father on some unfrequented height? Let us not cling to beds of sloth when God is awaiting us; let us heed his loving remonstrances, that we may be saved in the overthrow of the world; and let us, like Lot, pass on the word to others enwrapped in fatal slumber around us, bidding them to escape to the mountains, before the sun rise on the earth, lest they be consumed.

It was the practice of Sir Henry Havelock, during his campaigns in India, always to have two hours for prayer and Bible study before the march. If the camp was struck at 6.0 a.m., he would rise at 4. O.

The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus. [Ezra i. 1.](#)

THERE were many rays focussed on this spot. In the first place, it had been definitely foretold by Jeremiah that the captivity would only last for seventy years. In the next place, Daniel, having learned from comparison of dates that the allotted time had nearly expired, had set himself to pray. Also, if Josephus be credited, the aged prophet had shown the young king the predictions of Isaiah in which his own name was clearly mentioned: "Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden: . . . he shall build my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the Lord of hosts" ([Isa. xlv. 1, 13](#)).

God is the fountainhead and source of all spiritual blessing, and of all those great movements for the uplifting and enlightenment of mankind which have swept from time to time over the world. Go to Him when you want to reach the heart of kings, prophets, and people. Oh for the faith of Samuel, Elijah, Daniel, and other stalwart men of God, that through Him we may stir up the spirits of those who will not listen to our appeals! For the fervent prayer of a righteous man still availeth much. In prayer you can touch the spring of all the stirrings that the world needs.

But it is not enough for God to stir men, they must obey. It appears that only a comparatively small number of captive Jews obeyed the Divine stirring and came out of Babylon with the chief of the fathers. The call resounds for volunteers, but only a few respond; the inspiration breathes over us, but only some are susceptible to it. God works to will and to do, but only certain of the children of men work out what He works in. Whenever there is a Divine stirring abroad, let us rise up and go.

Till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummin. [Ezra ii. 63.](#)

IT must have been a great disappointment to these people who found themselves excluded from sharing as priests. Their names were not on the register, and so they had to wait until a properly-qualified authority could adjudicate their case. The mere inference of reason was not enough; they needed the direct corroboration of the anointed priest with Urim and with Thummim.

So in our life it is not enough to rely on the inference of reason, or to allow our Christian standing to be determined by the evidence of a document. We must seek the direct witness and testimony of the Holy Spirit. How many Christians there are who have no experimental knowledge of what the Apostle meant when he said that the Spirit witnesseth with our spirit that we are born again. They are always referring to inference, and the testimony of others; and therefore their consciousness varies, and they cannot eat of the holy bread of God. But when the Spirit of God speaks through the Urim and Thummim, and certifies that we are the children of God, giving us the white stone with its new name, and revealing Christ as dwelling within us, we have, immediately, boldness to enter into the holiest of all, and eat of the holy things.

Assurance is needful before we dare to appropriate the things which are freely given to us of God. Who of us is not able to verify this from his personal experience? We could not enjoy the Father's table, so long as there was a doubt about our sonship. But the assurance of faith may be ours as we wait in the presence of our great High Priest, speaking to us by the Holy Spirit, who witnesses with our spirits that we are the children of God.

And they set the altar upon its bases. [Ezra iii. 3.](#)

THIS is the first thing that must be done before our temple-building or other undertakings can be crowned with success. It was well that the returned remnant made this their care; it augured well for their future. The new start that God Himself was giving would have been invalidated without that altar, which meant forgiveness for the past, and renewed consecration for the future.

Where is the altar in your life? Where the burnt sacrifice which betokens entire surrender of consecration? It cannot be too often insisted on, that since Christ died for all, all died in Him. We were not only saved by his death, we were included in it, but we must appropriate and identify ourselves with it. We must look up to God and say, "I desire that this death should be mine, to the world, to sin, to the flesh; make it so by the power of the Holy Ghost, that in Jesus I may be truly dead unto sin, but alive unto Thee."

Perhaps that last clause will help some souls most. Do not perpetually dwell on the dying side, but think much of the living side. Yield yourselves to receive God's life, which is the life of the Son of God in the surrendered nature. Be very sensitive, and "quick of scent," to every movement and prompting of the Holy Spirit. Seek the things which are above, where Christ, your life, is seated. So you will find your energy drained away from self to Christ. Because He lives you will live also. A maple tree planted on a barren soil sent out one of its rootlets to a richer patch not far away, and ultimately all its roothold was there, till finally it was bodily moved and transferred from its first position to this more salubrious one.

Let us build with you. [Ezra iv. 2.](#)

AT first the world does its best to intimidate the Church; then it asks to be permitted to join with it. A most subtle temptation this. The child of God is greatly inclined to yield; the proposal seems so harmless, and so likely to be a means of blessing to the poor, hungry, weary world. But there is only one condition on which the world may be admitted; it must yield a true and humble submission to the cross, and be willing to give up all for Jesus — conditions which the world will not consider for a moment; and so its heart is filled with bitterness and gall, and it sets itself to hinder where it had professed willingness to help.

There are five things of which we are expressly bidden to beware — they are five phases of an unequal yoke: fellowship with unrighteousness; communion with darkness; concord with Belial; part with an unbeliever; agreement with idols. Let us beware of these things, and cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. There may seem to be great loss and needless sacrifice in dispensing with the help of Rehum and Shimshai; but if once we accepted their help, we should discover to our cost that they were adversaries still, and that their only desire was to retard our efforts.

We sometimes shrink from some great undertaking for God, and are inclined to accept the proffered aid of wealthy but ungodly men. But their help may be purchased by the cost of all that makes our work worth doing. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers; for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?"

"Yea, with one mouth, world, though thou deniest
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I."

The eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews. [Ezra v. 5.](#)

IT was a delightful thought amid obloquy and opposition, like that which the Jews were at this moment encountering, to know that God was watching them with jealous care. We are reminded of the words of the Psalmist, quoted and authenticated by the Apostle Peter, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil." And he goes on to argue, "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" The Jews certainly found it so; for the efforts of their enemies to induce them to desist from their work of temple-building were rendered nugatory and ineffectual by the special care exercised over them by their Almighty Friend.

It may be that you will have to encounter hatred and opposition in doing God's work; but be sure not to look at these things, but steadfastly to Jesus. Must you not watch the foe? No; you could not make a greater mistake. You must look away to the face of Jesus, and you will find that *He*, like a good shepherd, is looking carefully and lovingly down on you, and watching the stealthy movements of your foe. Even when we are not directly conscious of that watchful eye, it still follows us. He knoweth the way that you take; and He is acquainted with the varied circumstances of your life. He has pledged Himself to be with you for ever; as Wordsworth once said of his beloved daughter Dora : —

"Dear child, fair child, that walkest with me here,
Though thou appear untouched by solemn thought,
Thy nature is not therefore less divine;
Thou liest in Abraham's bosom all the year,
Thou worshipping at the temple's inner shrine,
God being with thee when thou knowest not."

The Lord had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the King unto them. [Ezra vi. 22.](#)

YES, the hearts of men are in the hands of God, and He can turn them whither He will. There are many instances of this in Scripture. God gave Joseph favour with Pharaoh; Moses with the Princess; and Daniel with the King of Babylon. If certain matters can only be settled by reference to great men, kings or men of affairs, make the application; and then betake yourself to prayer, believing that as He inclined the heart of Darius, in the instance before us, so He can do as He will among the armies of heaven, and the inhabitants of earth.

That unkind overseer, that vexatious member of your home-circle, that great man whose help you so greatly need — these are accessible to God's Spirit, if only you are intent on seeking his glory, and doing his will. But you must be able to show, as these Jews could, that your cause is identical with the cause of God, before you can claim, with unwavering faith, his interference on your behalf.

Then when the answer comes, let us thank Him, separating ourselves still further from the filthiness around us, so as to keep the feast with joy. Do not be afraid of joy; when God makes you joyful, do not think it necessary to restrain your songs or smiles, for fear that an equivalent of sorrow will presently be meted out as a make-weight. Our blessed Lord was desirous that his joy might be in his Disciples; it was for the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God; it is with exceeding joy that He will present us faultless before the presence of his glory. "Thou shalt rejoice in every good thing which the Lord thy God giveth thee."

I was strengthened, as the hand of the Lord my God was upon me. [Ezra vii. 28.](#)

IT was no small work that the good Ezra had undertaken. To lead a great expedition across the inhospitable desert; to convoy the sacred vessels and a large treasure of gold and silver; to set magistrates and judges over all that great district beyond the river — this was no slight task, and he needed strength. But in the simple language of his heart the good hand of his God was upon him, and that was sufficient to nerve and strengthen him.

It is wonderful what resistless might comes to the soul, when it realizes that it is treading the path and working out the career determined for it from all eternity by the Almighty. The thought imparts the same kind of impulse to the soul, as the touch of love or authority on the arm. We are reminded of the veteran, who, when charged by the Duke of Wellington to take a difficult position, turned to him and said, "I will go, sir; but first give me a grip of your conquering hand."

Think, soul, of what that hand is which holds the waters in its hollow, and spreads the curtains of the sky, and was nailed to the cross; that brought blessing with its touch to so many weary sufferers, and now holds the mysterious book, sealed with seven seals; that caught Peter, and lay lightly on the heads of the little babes. That hand is strengthening thee for a work for which by nature thou art unequal, but to which thou hast been evidently called. Go forward: it holds, guides, empowers thee. It can lead thee before kings, princes, and nobles, so that thou shalt not fear; it can preserve thee from dangers innumerable; it can shield thee from the fire of the enemy; and none, man or devil, can pluck you out of the Father's hand.

Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them at Jerusalem. [Ezra viii. 29.](#)

THEY were protected by God, whose presence with them across the wild desert made it needless to ask for an escort of soldiers; but they had to take care of the precious vessels of his house. It was a reciprocal trust. So it must be with us, as we are taught in [2 Tim. i. 12, 14.](#) There are two deposits, as the margin shows. We deposit ourselves, and all we are and have, with God; whilst He deposits with us his sacred Gospel, the vessels of which we must "guard through the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us," and be prepared to defend with our blood.

Our deposit with God. — How safe are they who commit their all to God! Faraday was asked, when dying, on what supposition he depended as he contemplated the other world; and he replied, "I am relying on no supposition, but on a certainty; I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him."

God's deposit with us. — But let us be true to our trust. The Holy Bible, the Doctrines of the Christian Church, the Day of Rest, the House of God, the ordinances of the Lord's Supper and Christian Bap-tism — these are some of the vessels which have been passed down to us, and we must hand on intact. Be ye clean that carry them! Oh, what joy it will be when we reach our destination, and can resign our trust, and weigh out the deposit, and hear the Master's "Well done!" But, in the meanwhile, whilst marching across the yellow sands, where wild dangers lie in wait, let us not seek the escort of creature or worldly might; but boast of the Hand of our God, which is for good upon all them that seek Him.

The people have not separated themselves. [Ezra ix. 1.](#)

THIS was only too true! There had been, on the part of princes and rulers, gross inter-marriage with the people of surrounding lands. The holy seed had become mixed and diluted. And it was the more sad that this should have taken place, when it was to cleanse his people from such alliances, and the evils to which they inevitably led, that God had passed them through the purging fires of the seventy years' captivity. It afflicted the good Ezra sorely. With every sign of Oriental grief he poured out his soul before God. And this is the lesson we should carry with us. It has been truly said that communion with the Lord dries many tears, but it starts many more. We no longer sorrow with the sorrow of the world; but we become burdened with some of the griefs that still rend the heart of the Lord in the glory.

This fellowship between the Lord's people and the world is becoming increasingly close as we near the end of the age. In the appointments of our homes, our amusements, books, and practices, there is very little to choose between the one and the other. If there is any distinction, it lies in a certain sadness with which Christians take their pleasures, as though remembering a something better. But the rest of us do not grieve over it; we do not rend our clothes: we do not take these things to heart, as though they specially concerned us.

Let us at least separate ourselves after the manner of Christ, who frequented the temple, acknowledged the State, accepted invitations to great houses; but his heart and speech always revolved about his Father. What if it led to our being cast out without the camp!

We also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it. [Ezra x. 4.](#)

THIS narrative reminds us of the story of Achan, who took of the accursed thing, and kindled the anger of the Lord against the children of Israel. There must be confession and the putting away of evil ere communion with God can be re-established.

It is not given to every one to be an Ezra. There are abuses to deal with, and wrongs to right, on every side; but they require to be dealt with by those who are specially adapted or qualified for the work. Be always ready to do such work, if there should be no one else. It was the life motto of a great man always to act as though there were no one else who would. Still, Nehemiahs and Ezras are not given very largely to the Church or the world; and, for the most part, we must be content to be of those who say, "Be of good courage, and do it; we also will be with thee." But though this seems but a little thing, it may lead to great results. Many a man has been urged to a noble deed by the encouragement he received at a critical hour from some unknown and obscure disciple.

If you cannot do a great thing, identify yourself with one who can. Stand by him, identify yourself with him in public or private, by sympathy and prayer. Though the strongholds of evil are great and high, they may be swept away before an avalanche of snowflakes, any one of which would melt in the warm hand of a child.

Oh for more of that magnanimity, which is quick to recognise the matters that belong to certain elect souls — not envying, nor disparaging, but frankly confessing their eminent qualifications, and falling in to further and accelerate their success, which will be the gain of all!

I was the king's cupbearer . [Neh. i. 11.](#)

THE post was an important one. It gave its occupant the opportunity of coming into close contact with the king; it implied a character of unusual trustworthiness, since Oriental despots were very afraid of poison. But no one expected a royal cupbearer to do anything very heroic. He lived in the inner part of the palace, and was necessarily excluded from the great deeds of the stirring outward world. Nehemiah also was evidently a humble and retiring man. His response to the story of the ruined condition of Jerusalem was just a flood of tears and prayer to the God of heaven. And had you seen those tears and heard that prayer, you might have thought that just another flower was drooping, another seed falling into the ground to die.

But this was not all. These prayers and tears were supplemented by an earnest purpose, which was maturing with every hour. He gave himself to God to be used, if God would have it so, as an instrument in the execution of his recorded purpose. He was a man of faith. It mattered little enough that he was only a cupbearer, for that was no barrier to God; indeed, God might work more efficiently through a frail, weak man, than through the prince, the soldier, or the orator, since He cannot give his glory to another. What a glorious faith was his, which dared to believe that through his yielded life God could pour his mighty rivers! Why do we not yield ourselves in our helplessness to God, and ask Him to work through us, to fulfil his mighty purposes?

"We kneel, how weak! We rise, how full of power!
Why therefore should we do ourselves this wrong,
Or others — that we are not always strong!"

So I prayed to the God of Heaven. [Neh. ii. 4.](#)

ALL around the apartment in which this interview took place were effigies of idol gods: perhaps incense was burning before a shrine, and filling the air with its aroma. But Nehemiah, though standing amid these heathen emblems, and in the presence of the greatest king on earth, thought little of either one or the other, and prostrated himself in spirit before the throne of heaven. Remember that thou hast within thee a shrine, a temple into which at any moment, even amid the excitement of an earthly court, thou mayest retire and ask direction of thy King and Friend.

He had been sorely startled by the king's question; he did not know that his face had betrayed him. He had, doubtless, intended to seek an interview with the king, and formally state the whole case (see i. 11). But to be taken thus at unawares, to have to state his case on the spur of the moment, appeared to take him at a great disadvantage; and he instinctively turned to prayer.

How little the king knew what was transpiring, or what had happened between his question and the reply which was given, apparently, without the loss of a moment. But how beautiful is the example for ourselves! You cannot acquire this habit of ejaculatory prayer unless you spend prolonged periods in holy fellowship. But when you are much with God in private, you will not find it difficult at any moment to step aside to ask Him a question. The busy mart or the crowded street may at any time become the place of prayer.

"A touch divine
And the sealed eyeball owns the mystic rod;
Visibly through His garden walketh God."

Every one over against his house. [Neh. iii. 28.](#)

THIS is the way to deal with the evil of this world. We are all fonder of starting schemes, forming committees, and discussing methods of work, than in setting definitely to work for ourselves. There is a lack of definiteness, and we hardly know where to begin. But this verse suggests that every one should begin over against his own house. Try and make your own neighbourhood a little more like what God would have it. It may be that you have gone too far afield in search of work; you are applying to the Foreign Missionary Society, or are waiting for a sphere of service; yet, all the time, there is that wretched neighbourhood, like a piece of ruined wall before you. Arise and repair it!

Meshullam repaired over against his chamber (ver. 30). Perhaps he was not rich enough to have a whole house; he lived in a single room, but he discovered that there was a little bit of the wall just opposite his window, which would not be built unless he set to it. Is not that a hint for college students, and for those who live in flats, or industrial dwellings?

The best way is not immediately to begin giving tracts, good though that is in its place. Ask God to give you an opportunity of showing kindness to your neighbours, so that they get to understand and trust you; and wait upon God until the answer comes — until He shall show you what step He would have you take next. This is the foundation of your bit of wall. Then plod on step by step, tier by tier. God will show you how. You may be unpractised in wall-building; but He is the Architect and Builder, and you are but a bricklayer's labourer at the best. Do as He tells you.

Remember the Lord. [Neh. iv. 14.](#)

IT was uncommonly good advice. Amid all the wise precautions taken by this man of sanctified common-sense, he kept bringing the people back to God. God was amongst them. God would fight for them. God was going to bring the counsel of their enemies to nought.

This would make a good motto for daily living. If in all circumstances we would remember the Lord, the way would be brightened; the burdens would fall; our spirits would never droop; and songs of joy would take the place of sadness. Whenever enemies assail and difficulties gather like storm-clouds, look away from them and remember the Lord. When hemmed in on every side, be sure that He can help you from his holy heaven; remember the Lord. When heart and flesh fail, and you do not know what to do for the best, be sure to remember the Lord, and act as in his most holy presence. What a comfort and strength it is to see a friend, when standing amid a crowd of adversaries intent on your destruction, and to know that he will act and speak for you! But remember that Jesus is always like that.

You say that you forget so soon; that you would remember, though at the critical moment you are betrayed into forgetfulness. But you must recall His precious promise, that the Holy Spirit will bring all to remembrance. If only you will trust the difficulty into his hands, you will find that He will gladly undertake it; and as long as you leave it with Him, you will hear his voice rising in your heart, and saying, "Remember the Lord."

"Watch with me, Jesus, in my loneliness,
Though others say me Nay, yet say Thou, Yea;
Though others pass me by, stop Thou to bless.

So did not I, because of the fear of God. [Neh. v. 15.](#)

THESE were great words. Nehemiah had a perfect right to take this money. Not a word could be said even by his critics, if he did. He was doing a priceless work, and might justly claim his maintenance. On the other hand, the people were very poor, and he would have a larger influence over them if he were prepared to stand on their level, and to share with them. It was just so that the Apostle argued in [1 Cor. ix.](#) And from both we learn that often we must forego our evident rights and liberties in order to influence others for Christ. Do not always stand on your rights; but live for others, making any sacrifice in order to save some — even as Christ loved us, and gave Himself for us.

If Nehemiah did so much for the holy fear of God, what ought not we to do for love? Love is more inexorable than law. Its exactions are more stringent and searching. Are we doing as much for Love of Jesus as generations before did simply on the score of duty? It is much to be questioned if Jesus does not get less, of outward service at least, out of his followers, than Mehomet or Buddha does. But what He does get is infinitely sweet to Him, in so far as love prompts it.

All around you people are doing things that they say are perfectly legitimate; they call you narrow and bigoted because you do not join with them; they are always arguing with you to prove you are wrong. But your supreme law is your attitude to your Master. "I cannot do otherwise for the love of Jesus."

"Not I, because of the fear of God."

"Not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

"Not I, but Christ liveth in me."

I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down. [Neh. vi. 3.](#)

IT was a sublime answer. Below was the Plain of Ono, where Nehemiah's foes awaited him. Let him once descend into it and he would become their easy prey; but he withstood their four-fold solicitation by considering the greatness of the work he was doing and the responsible position he was called to fill. Other-worldliness is the best cure for worldliness. Those whose affections are set on things above, will have no difficulty in refusing the appeals of sense. Get your heart and hands deeply engaged in the great work of building God's Temple, and you will be proof to the most flattering proposals ever made by Madam Bubble.

Oh, children of the Great King, let us pray that we may know the grandeur of our position before Him; the high calling with which we have been called; the vast responsibilities with which we are entrusted; the great work of co-operating with God in erecting the city of God. Heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ! Called to sit with Christ in the Heavenlies! Risen, ascended, crowned in Him! Sitting with Christ, far above all principality and power! How can we go down — down to the world that rejected Him; down to the level of the first Adam, from which, at so great cost, we have been raised; down to the quarry from which we were hewn, and the hole of the pit whence we were digged! No, it cannot be; and as we make our choice, let us look to the living and ascended Christ to make it good. Put your will on his side, and expect that the energy of the power that raised Him from the dead will raise and maintain you in union with Him. For "your life is hid with Christ in God."

It was not found. [Neh. vii. 64.](#)

CERTAIN claimed the maintenance of the priests, and were challenged to show their name in the register of the priestly line. In all likelihood they were descended from the sons of Aaron, but through marriage outside the priestly clan, and through the fact also of the name of the mother's father being adopted, their names were not reckoned in the priestly genealogy; consequently, their claim for priestly maintenance and service could not be established.

Is there not something like this still? Men, who were called to be God's priests, drop out of the register of those who serve before Him. It may be they are not sure of their genealogy, and have lost the assurance of sonship; their spirit is no longer filled with the blessed co-witness of the Holy Ghost. God is afar from them; and, being out of harmony with Him, they are out of sympathy with their fellows. They are, therefore, rightly put out of the priesthood.

Now trace this matter back to its beginning. As likely as not you will find it originated in some worldly alliance. He that will be a friend of the world is necessarily an enemy with God. For a mess of pottage Esau loses his birthright.

But all this can be put right. There has arisen a Priest, who holds the Urim and Thummim in his hand: God's own Priest after the order of Melchizedek. "Wherefore it behoved Him in all things to be made like unto his brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God." He waits to reinstate the erring soul, restore it to the priestly office, and give it priestly food and maintenance.

The joy of the Lord is your strength. [Neh. viii. 10.](#)

"THE sad heart tires in a mile," is a frequent proverb. What a difference there is between the energy of the healthy, joyous heart and the forced activity of the morbid and depressed one! The one leaps to its task, the other creeps to it. The one discovers its meat and drink in self-sacrifice, the other limps, and stoops, and crawls. If you want to be strong for life's work, be sure to keep a glad heart. But, be equally sure to be glad with the joy of Lord. There is a counterfeit of it in the world, of which we must beware — an outward merry-making, jesting, and mad laughter, which hides an aching and miserable heart. Solomon compares the joy of the world to the crackling of thorns under a pot, which flare up with great speed, but burn out before the water in the pot is warm.

Ours must be the joy of the Lord. It begins with the assurance of forgiveness and acceptance in the Beloved. It is nourished in trial and tribulation, which veil outward sources of consolation, and lead us to rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus. It is independent of circumstances, so that its possessors can sing in the stocks. It lives not in the gifts of God, but in God Himself. It is the fruit of the Spirit, who begets in us love, joy, peace, long-suffering. Get the Lord Himself to fill your soul, and joy will be as natural as the murmur of a brook to its flow.

And such joy will always reveal itself to others. You will desire to send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared. Your joy will be contagious; it will shed its kindly light on sad and weary hearts. As Rutherford said, we have a new heaven in the heaven of every soul we bring there.

The seed of Israel separated themselves. [Neh. ix. 2.](#)

THIS is the beginning of the true life. Turn to the story of creation, and you learn, first, that God divided the light from the darkness; next, the waters of the clouds from those on the earth; and next, the seas from the land. It was only thus that He could effect his purpose of substituting kosmos for chaos. So, in the development of the inner life, there must be separation and judgment; the discrimination of the false from the true, the evil from the good." Separate Me . . . for the work whereunto I have called them."

When God put his hand to man's highest culture, He separated Shem from his brethren; Terah's house from other kindred clans; and Abraham from his people. What weight this gave to those solemn words, "I am the Lord your God, which have separated you from other people. And ye shall be holy unto Me; for I the Lord am holy, and have severed you from other people that ye should be mine" ([Lev. xx. 24, 26](#)). It was not that God had no care for the great world; but that He desired to concentrate his attention on a few, that when they had fully caught his thought they might pass it on to mankind.

This accounts for the cry of the Holy Ghost through the Apostle, "Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing." We must be separate in our *practices*, cleansing ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; in our *pursuits*, going with Christ without the camp; in our *pleasures*; and in our *alliances*. "Follow the Christ — the King! Live pure! Speak true! Right wrong! Follow the King! Else, wherefore born! "

The children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering. [Neh. x. 39.](#)

IT was about this time that Malachi wrote the memorable words, "Bring ye all the tithes into my storehouse, that there may be meat in my house; and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord, if I will not pour you out a blessing." When a people has separated itself to God, there will be no lack in its house, no failure in its supplies, no lack for its ministers. So with the individual. All they that had separated themselves entered into an oath to charge themselves yearly for the service of the house of God. Separation is the negative side of consecration.

How does this touch you, my friend? What proportion of your income are you setting apart for the service of God? The amount that a man gives in proportion to his income is a sure gauge of the genuineness and depth of his religious life. The Jew gave about a third of his yearly income to God; do we come up to this standard? Yet we speak of the Jews with contempt, as hard-fisted and miserly. These *old* Jews might set an example to us *newer* Christians. How often we reverse our position from God's ideal! He puts us over his estate that we should send Him all the produce, after deducting what is necessary for our maintenance, and that of our families. But we engross the entire proceeds for ourselves, sending Him an odd guinea, or half-crown, when we can easily spare it. Let us see that we give at least a fixed proportion of our income, and as much more as we can. Do not forsake the House of your God; so shall the heavens be opened in blessing. "There is that giveth and yet increaseth; there is that withholdeth more than is meet, and it sendeth to poverty."

A certain portion should be for the singers. [Neh. xi. 23.](#)

IT was the king's command, and it was very right and sensible, because they enlivened and quickened the life of the entire community. A mere utilitarian spirit might have refused to maintain them, because they did not contribute to the handicrafts of the community. They only sang the praises of God; but they fulfilled a very important part in the life of the city, and they deserved the portion which was regularly contributed to them.

You sometimes feel your life to be comparatively useless. You can only say a kind word to those who are doing the main business of the world. When the brothers had wrought all day at the clearing for the farm, their sister Hope sang through the evening hours to cheer them and drive away their sense of fatigue. That was all she could do; but was she not deserving of maintenance? You can only sing your song of hope, and keep the heart of the toilers sweet and fresh. You can only get inspiration from God's heart and pass it on. You can do little but learn to detect, and translate into music that men love, the deep undertones of God's creation. But it is well. You are needed in God's world.

There are invalids, who lie on their back through weary months and years, that are the inspiration of their homes, and to their side the elders and the children come for counsel and comfort. Sing on, ye sweet choristers, that alleviate our depressions and start our hearts to high endeavour! Ye that by night, in sleepless hours, stand in the house of the Lord, praise

ye the Lord when all the busy life of men is hushed! The King will see to it that ye do not miss your maintenance, your portion day by day.

David, the man of God. [Neh. xii. 24, 36, 37, 45, 46.](#)

HOW long the influence of David has lingered over the world, like the afterglow of a sunset! Mark the characteristic in him which laid the foundation of his supremacy over the hearts of his countrymen. He was pre-eminently "a man of God." Notwithstanding his terrible fall, his people recognised that his salient characteristic was Godward. Would you be one of God's men?

(1) *Give all to God.* — Too many live lives of piecemeal consecration, giving a bit here and a bit there, but never all. David surrendered himself to do God's will utterly, and in all, and so became a man after God's own heart. With what joy God's voice seems to quiver, as He says, "I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, who shall fulfil all my will" ([Acts xiii. 22](#)). Without reserve, holding nothing back, yield yourself to God, to be, and do, and suffer his will, whatever it may be.

(2) *Take all from God.* — "It is not what we give to Jesus, but what we take from Him, that makes us strong, helpful, and victorious day by day." Accept this as a fact, that in Jesus God has made all his fulness dwell. There is nothing we require, for life or godliness, that is not stored in Him; but the terrible loss of our lives is that we take so little. We have ourselves to blame if we are poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked.

(3) *Use all for God.* — It sometimes appears as though Christian people were urged to yield themselves to God, only that their lives might be more comfortable. But the supreme and final end in all surrender must be that his will be done, his glory promoted, and Himself magnified whether in life or death.

Remember me, O my God! [Neh. xiii. 14, 22, 31.](#)

THRICE in this chapter this humble man asks to be remembered. We cannot think that he expected to purchase God's favour because of his sacrifices and endeavours. Of this he was already assured. But being a redeemed soul, he desired that his works might come up in remembrance before God, and secure a reward. There is no harm in keeping the eye fixed on the reward for faithful toil in the Lord's service. It was a constant incentive in the life, of the great Apostle that he might so run as to obtain; so finish his work that he might win the crown.

Note the three departments of service mentioned in this chapter, in connection with which Nehemiah breathed this petition. He had turned all Tobia's household stuff out of the temple, so that the whole structure should be given up to the service of God. He had secured the Sabbath from desecration, so that its holy rest and calm were preserved intact. And he insisted on the purity of the holy seed being untainted by foreign alliances. Consecration to God, the Rest of Faith in the inner life, and the separation of God's children from the world, are the counterparts of these in our own time.

Shall we not humbly set ourselves to seek them for the professing Church? Nehemiah was an ungifted, simple-hearted man, but he was able to secure them as the instrument and channel of God's purposes. Why should not God work through us for the same ends. But, first, let us see to it that each of these particulars is being realized in our own personal character and life. Let every room of the heart be for God; let no voice break the inner peace. Then what God has done for us, we may confidently plead as within his scheme for others.

That every man should bear rule in his own house. [Esther i. 22.](#)

ONE of the pre-requisites in choosing a presiding officer in the early Church was that he should rule well his own house; "for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?" ([1 Tim. iii. 4, 5](#)).

When a man bears rule as husband and father in the love of God, there is no issue of commands which conflict with primary obligations; rather than that, his authority represents the Divine authority. As Christ received his authority from the Father, so does a man derive and receive his from Christ; and in the recognition of his delegated right and ability to lead, the entire household becomes well ordered. The relaxation of the bonds of authority and government in our homes is one of the saddest symptoms of national decay, as it is among the predicted signs of the end ([2 Tim. iii. 2, 3](#)).

But, on the other hand, you must show yourself worthy to lead and rule your home. Your character must be such as to command respect. Those whom God has put into your charge require that you do not use your authority for selfish or capricious ends. Above all, love is the source of the truest authority. We count nothing hard or irksome that we do for those we love. Show love, and you will win love; and on love will be built respect, reverence, and obedience.

One of the most eloquent of modern Italians has said truly: "You can only obtain the exercise of your rights by deserving them, through your own activity, and your own spirit of love and sacrifice!" Christ's golden rule holds good in every phase of life — "In all things, whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

Hadassah, that is, Esther. [Esther ii. 7.](#)

THROUGH this one girl-life God was about to save his people, though He was all the while hidden from view. The peculiarity of this book is that there is no mention of the name of God; but there is no book in the Bible more full of the presence and working of God for his own. His name is clearly in the watermark of the paper, if it do not appear in the print.

We know that the meshes of evil plotting were laid for the hurt of Israel long before the fatal decree was made for the destruction of the entire nation; but here we find that God has begun his preparations for deliverance long before. In the beauty of Esther, in the position her uncle held at court, in the favour she won with the king, in the discovery through Mordecai of the plot against the king's life, there are the materials of a great and Divine deliverance. God was clearly beforehand to the devil. The angels of light were on the ground before those of darkness were marshalled.

It is a sweet thought to carry with us always: God prepares of his goodness for the poor. He prepares the good work in which we are to walk, and the deliverances by which He will succour us in the hour of need. Do not dread the foe, be not fearful nor dismayed, as he draws his net around thee; God has prepared a way of escape, so that thou shalt be able to bear it. In the meanwhile, rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him; trust in the Lord; wait for the Lord; be silent to the Lord. He is more farseeing, his plans more far-reaching, his help more certain, than all the stratagems of evil. God laughs at them. Into the pit they have dug, thine enemies shall fall.

But Mordecai bowed not. [Esther iii. 2.](#)

THERE was stern stuff in this old Jew. He was not going to prostrate himself before one so haughty and so depraved as Haman, albeit that he was the king's favourite. To be the only one in a city office that does not laugh at the questionable story; to stand alone on shipboard against the gambling mania; to refuse to countenance cleverness which is divorced from cleanness, and genius which is apart from goodness — this is to do as Mordecai did in the gate of the king's palace.

Only God can give this power, since of ourselves we are as reeds shaken by the wind. Sooner might a single ear of wheat resist the breeze that bends all its companions in the same direction, than we stand alone, whilst all our associates bow, unless God Himself enable us. But God is prepared to enable us. Listen: "I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." But the mistake we are so apt to make is to brace ourselves up by resolution and firm determination, in anticipation of some impending struggle. To do this is to fail. Live in Christ, look up into his face, derive from Him strength for the moment and at the moment; and often wrap about thee that exceeding great and precious promise, "I will make him to become a pillar in the temple of my God; and he shall go no more out; and I will write on him the name of my God." Oh to stand pillar-like amid men, bearing up the temple arch of truth, and inscribed with God's name, whilst the crowds go and come on the pavement beneath!

"Greatly begin! though thou have time
But for a line, be that sublime —
Not Failure, but low aim, is Crime!"

Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? [Esther iv. 14.](#)

WHAT grand faith was here! Mordecai was in God's secrets, and was assured that deliverance and enlargement would come to his people from some quarter — if not from Esther, then from some other; but he was extremely anxious that she should not miss the honour of being her people's emancipator. Therefore he suggested that she had come to her high position for this very purpose.

We none of us know, at the first, God's reasons for bringing us into positions of honour and trust. Why is that young girl suddenly made mistress over that household? Why is that youth taken from the ranks of the working-people, and placed over that great City church? Why is that man put forward in his business, so that he is the head of the firm in which he served as an office-boy? All these are parts of the Divine plan. God has brought them to the Kingdom that He may work out through them some great purpose of salvation. They have the option, however, to serve it or not. They may use their position for themselves, for their own emolument and enjoyment, that they may surround themselves with strong fortifications against misfortune; but in that case they court destruction. Their position and wealth may vanish as suddenly as it came; or ill-health and disaster may incapacitate them.

If, on the other hand, all is used for God, though at the risk of perishing — for it seemed to Esther as though the action to which Mordecai urged her meant that — the issue is blessed. Those that love their lives lose them; those that are prepared to forfeit them keep them. The wheat grain which is buried in the soil bears much fruit.

The king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. [Esther v. 2.](#)

WHAT a beautiful type this is for each of us in our approaches to God!

For the repentant sinner. — You may have said with Esther, "I will go into the king's presence, and if I perish, I perish." But it is impossible for you to perish. None ever perished at the footstool of mercy. God is faithful to his promises, and just to his Son; and He can do no other — He wants to do no other — than forgive. As you stand amid the throng that surrounds his throne, He will espy you, and accept you graciously, because of the God-Man who sits at his right hand, and ever lives to intercede. In his name you may come boldly and obtain mercy.

For the suppliant. — You have a great boon to ask for yourself, or another. The King's court stands open; enter and lodge your petition. He will be very gracious at the voice of your cry: the golden sceptre extended, his word passed, that He will answer with the whole resources of his kingdom. The answer may not come at once, or in the way you expected; but no true suppliant was ever turned away without his complaint or cause being graciously considered, and in the best way met and adjusted.

For the Christian worker. — Surely Esther represents a Paul prepared to be himself accursed, a Luther, a Brainerd. It is a lovely sight when the child of God is so oppressed with the burden of other souls as to sacrifice all else in order to plead their cause. Surely such find favour with God; they are kindred spirits with his own, and He bids them share his throne. God will do anything for those who are consumed by his own redemptive purpose.

As thou hast said, do even so to Mordecai the Jew. [Esther vi. 10.](#)

HERE indeed was a turning of the tables! Haman doing honour to the humble Jew, who refused to do honour to himself. Surely that day the old refrain must have rung through Mordecai's heart: — "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's." And there was an anticipation of yet other words: — "For thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name: behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee."

How evidently God was working for his child. The gallows, indeed, was being prepared, but it would be used for Haman; whilst the triumph that Haman thought to be preparing for himself was to be used for Mordecai.

This is not an isolated case. Any one who has lived a few years in the world and has observed the ways of God could duplicate it with instances that have come under his own notice. Dr. Gordon told us once of a church in Boston that would not admit coloured people; and after a few years it broke up, and the edifice is now occupied by a flourishing coloured church.

Trust on, beloved friend, amid scorn, hate, and threatening death. So long as thy cause is God's, it must prevail. He will vindicate thee. Them that honour Him He will honour; whilst those that despise Him shall be lightly esteemed.

"Though the mills of God grind slowly,
Yet they grind exceeding small;
Though with patience He stands waiting,
With exactness grinds He all."

What is thy petition, and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? [Esther vii. 2.](#)

AMID the sensual conceptions of marriage that obtained in this heathen empire there was doubtless a consciousness in the king's breast of the essential unity between himself and his beautiful queen. She was his better self, and in her pleading he heard the voice of his own higher nature. To nothing less than this could he have made so far-reaching a promise. It was not so much Ahasuerus pledging himself to Esther, as Ahasuerus, the king, awakening to the appeal of a nobler Ahasuerus, for the most part buried. Such is the power of a pure and noble character awakening a nobler life. Will you try by your unselfishness and purity to awaken those around you to see and follow an ideal, which shall presently assume the form of the living Christ?

In these words of the king we are reminded that God is willing to do beyond what we ask or think. Not to the half of his kingdom, but to the whole extent of it, has God pledged Himself, "according to the power that worketh in us." But our prayer must be in the name, or nature, of Christ; that is, the nature of Christ must pray in us, and God must recognise Himself come back through the circle of our intercession to Himself. The Spirit must make intercession in us, according to the will of God. When the unselfish, lovely, and holy nature of Jesus pleads in us by the Holy Ghost, there is nothing that God will not do for us, even to the whole of his kingdom.

"If ye abide in Me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

"Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name He will give it you."

Sealed with the king's ring. [Esther viii. 8.](#)

IN chap. iii. 10 the king took the ring from his hand, and gave it to Haman. It is evident that he had resumed it from his chief officer's finger before sending him to execution. It was now entrusted to Mordecai, because it gave validity to the documents that proclaimed liberty to the Jews. Notice those words: "The writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's seal, no man may reverse," and apply them to that sealing with the Holy Ghost, of which we read so often in the New Testament.

On the molten wax the ring, with its royal device, or perhaps the cutting of the royal profile, was pressed, giving sanction, validity, and irreversibility; so on the tender heart of the believer in Christ, the Holy Spirit impresses the likeness of Jesus. The seal does not leave an impression of itself, but of the sovereign; and the Holy Spirit reveals not Himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and aims only to leave the mark and superscription of Christ on the character. The word *character* is used in [Hebrews i. 3](#) (see Greek). How wonderful, that as the image or character of the Father was impressed on Christ, so the Saviour's image and character are impressed on us! "Him hath God the Father sealed," says the evangelist. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, by whom ye were sealed," says the Apostle.

This sealing us with the likeness of Jesus is God's attestation. It is his witness that we are born from above, and are become his sons and daughters. It is God's sign manual of his intention and decree that we should inherit an irreversible portion; and when God has once passed and sealed it, neither man nor devil can reverse it.

The Jews had rule over them that hated them . [Esther ix. 1.](#)

YES, my reader, a similar reversal awaits us in the near future! Now, the god of this world and his followers bear rule over us, and work their way with the servants of God. They butcher them like sheep, and scatter the ashes of their homes to the winds; and sometimes it seems as though God had forgotten to avenge the cause of his saints. But the hour is coming when the Almighty will arise on our behalf; and to him who has patiently kept his works unto the end, He will give authority over the nations. Listen to these great words: "Behold, I give of the synagogue of Satan, of them which say they are Jews, and they are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." Words more applicable to the case of the Jews in the days of Mordecai, and to the history of the Church, it would be impossible to find.

But mark a notable distinction. In the case of the enemies of the Jewish people, there was no quarter. Destruction and death were meted to those who had breathed out persecution and slaughter. But in the case of Christ and his Church, power is viewed only as an opportunity of securing salvation and life. The Saviour said, after his resurrection, "All power is given unto Me in heaven and on earth; go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: and lo, I am with you alway." And the Church says, as through suffering she passes to the right hand of power, "Lay not this sin to their charge; but out of our persecutors raise apostles to carry the Gospel to the confines of the earth."

Seeking the good of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed. [Esther x. 3](#) (R.V.).

THIS epitaph on the life of a simple-minded, truehearted man, might be yours also. Why should you not from this moment adopt these, twin characteristics? Go about the world *seeking the good of people*. It does not always mean that you should give them a tract, or a little book. It is much easier to do this than to sacrifice your own good in order to seek theirs. You may be quite sure that some little act of self-sacrifice or thoughtfulness for a weary mother, or crying child, for a sick friend, or for some person who is always maligning and injuring you, would do a great deal in the way of preparing an entrance for the Gospel message. It is thus that the genial spring loosens the earth and prepares the way for the germination of multitudinous life. Count the day lost in which you have not sought to promote the good of some one. Adopt as your own the pious Quaker's motto, "Do all the good you can, to all the people you can, in all the ways you can."

Speak peace to people. — Soothe agitated and irritated souls. Throw oil on troubled waters. There are worried and anxious hearts all around us; a word of sympathy and earnest prayer with them will often remove the heavy load, and smooth out the wrinkles of care. Let the law of kindness be on your lip. Do not say sharp or unkind things of the absent, or allow your lips to utter words that will lead to bitterness or wrath. Seek peace and pursue it. And in order to this, let the peace of God that passeth all understanding keep your mind and heart.

"Come, my beloved! We will haste and go
To those pale faces of our fellow-men!
Our loving hearts, burning with summer-fire,
Shall cast a glow upon their pallidness."

Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned and renounced God in their hearts. [Job i. 5](#) (R.V.).

TIMES of festivity are always full of temptation. The loins are relaxed, the girdle of the soul is loosed. Amid the general hilarity and the passing of the merry joke, words are said and thoughts permitted which are not always consistent with the character of God and his glorious kingdom and service. Job was not wrong, therefore, in supposing that his children might have contracted some defiling stain.

It necessary for some of us to move in society, and to attend festive gatherings. As the Lord went to the wedding feast, and accepted Simon's invitation, so must we. The sphere of our life lies necessarily in the world. But when we are entering scenes of recreation and pleasure we should be more than ever careful to put on our armour, and by previous meditation and prayer prepare ourselves for the inevitable temptation; and when it is all over, and the lights are down, we should quietly review our behaviour under the light that streams from the Word of God. If we then are made aware of frivolous or uncharitable words, of jealousy because others have outshone us, or of pride at the splendour of our dress and the brilliance of our talk, we must confess it, and obtain forgiveness and restoration.

What a beautiful example is furnished by Job to Christian parents! When your girls are going among strangers, and your boys into the great ways of the world, and you are unable to impose your will upon them, as in the days of childhood, you can yet pray for them, casting over them the shield of intercession, with strong cryings and tears. They are beyond your reach; but by faith you can move the arm of God on their behalf.

A perfect and an upright man. [Job ii. 3.](#)

EVEN God spoke of Job as perfect. Not that he was absolutely so, as judged by the perfect standard of eternity, but as judged by the standard of his own light and knowledge. He was living up to all the requirements of God and man, so far as he understood them. His whole being was open and obedient to the Divine impulses. So far as he knew there was no cause of controversy in heart or life. Probably he could have adopted the words of the Apostle, "I know nothing against myself." He exercised himself to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and man.

Satan suggested that his goodness was pure selfishness; that it paid him well to be as he was, because God had hedged him around and blessed his substance. This malignant suggestion was at once dealt with by the Almighty Vindicator of the saints. It was as if God said, "I give thee permission to deprive him of all those favouring conditions, for the sake of which thou sayest he is bribed to goodness; and it shall be seen that his integrity is rooted deep down in the work of my grace upon his heart."

But the book goes on to show that God desired to teach Job that there were flaws and blemishes in his character which could only be seen by comparing it with the more perfect glory of his own Divine nature. His friends sought to prove him faulty, and failed; God revealed himself, and he cried, "Behold, I am vile, and abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

How often God takes away our consolations, that we may only love Him for Himself; and reveals our sinfulness, that we may better appreciate the completeness of his salvation!

Job opened his mouth, and cursed his day. [Job iii. 1.](#)

THAT is, the day of his birth. Probably there have been hours in the majority of lives in which men have wished that they had never been born. When they have stood beside the wreck of all earthly hope, or entered the garden of the grave they have cried, "Why died I not from the birth!" The reason for this is, that the heart has been so occupied with the transient and earthly, that it has lost sight of the unseen and eternal; and in finding itself deprived of the former, it has thought that there was nothing left to live for.

One of the greatest tests of true religion is in bearing suffering. At such a time we are apt, if we are professing Christians, to exert a certain constraint over ourselves, and bear ourselves heroically. We have read of people in like circumstances who have not shed a tear or uttered a complaining word; and we have braced ourselves to a Christian stoicism. "I am sure you cannot find fault with my behaviour," said one such to me. And yet beneath the correct exterior there may be the pride and haughtiness of an altogether unsubdued self.

There is a more excellent way: to humble oneself under the mighty hand of God; to search the heart for any dross that needs to be burnt out; to resign oneself to the will of the Father; to endeavour to learn the lesson in the black-lettered book; to seek to manifest the specific grace for which the trial calls; to be very tender and thoughtful for others; to live deeper down.

"Nearer, my God to Thee! — Nearer to Thee!
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me,
Still all my song shall be — Nearer, my God, to Thee!
Nearer to Thee!"

But now it is come unto thee, and thou faintest. [Job iv. 5](#) (R.V.).

IT is much easier to counsel others in their trouble than to bear it ourselves. Full often the soul, which has poured floods of consolation on others, feels sadly in need of a touch, a voice, a sympathising companion, as the chill waters begin to rise towards the knees, and the shadow of the great eclipse falls around. The fact of our having consoled so many others seems at such a moment to leave us the more solitary and lonesome. People have been so wont to be helped by us that they hardly dare approach us; besides, they suppose that all the fund of comfort from which we have succoured others must be now available for us. What can *they* say that *we* have not said a hundred times? and if we have *said* it, of course we must *know* all about it; but they do not know how wistful the heart is to hear it said to us with the accent of a sympathetic voice and the touch of a ministering hand.

Ah, it will come unto thee at last. The pain and sorrow of life will find thee out. The arrow will at last fix itself quivering in thy heart. How wilt thou do then? Thou wilt faint unless thy words have sprung from a living experience of the love and presence of Jesus. Thou must have a better hope than "the integrity of thy ways," as suggested by Eliphaz. But there awaits thee the personal fellowship of Jesus, a brother born for the hour of trial. He is the never-failing Friend, who sticketh closer than a brother. Put Him and his will and his choice between thee and thy sorrow, whatever it may be. Hide thee in his secret place, and under the shadow of his wings thou shalt enjoy sweet peace.

"Only heaven Is better than a walk
With Christ at midnight over moonlit seas."

He maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth and his hands make whole. [Job v. 18.](#)

HAS this been your experience lately? Have you been made sore by the heavy scourge of pain, and wounded by the nails of the cross? Do not look at second causes. Men may have been the instruments, but God is the Agent. The cup has been presented by a Judas, but the Father permitted it; and it is therefore the cup that the Father hath given you to drink. Shall you not drink it? How much He must love you, to dare to inflict this awful discipline, which makes your love and trust, that He values so infinitely, tremble in the scale! "Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of Him; for whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth."

But do not look back on what you have suffered; look on and up! As surely as He has made sore, He will bind up; as soon as He has wounded, his hands will begin to make whole. Consider the reparative processes of nature. So soon as the unsightly ruin or chasm yawns, nature begins to weave her rich festoons, to cover it with moss and lichen; let the flesh be punctured or lacerated, the blood begins to pour out the protoplasmic matter to be woven into a new fabric. So when the heart seems bleeding its life away, God is at work binding up and healing. Think of those dear and tender hands, that fashioned the heavens, and touched the eyeballs of the blind, as laid upon you to make you whole. Trust Him; He loves infinitely, and will suffer none that trust in Him to be desolate.

We must be careful, however, that nothing on our part shall hinder the life of the Son of God from flowing through us, as the sap of the vine through every branch.

As a brook, as the channel of brooks that pass away. [Job vi. 15](#) (R.V.).

JOB complains of his three friends. He was glad when they first came to his side, as likely to yield him comfort in his sore distress. Instead of this, however, they began probing his heart and searching his life, to find the secret sin on account of which his heavy troubles had befallen him. Their philosophy was at fault. They held that special misfortune is always the result of special sin; and since there was nothing in Job's outward conduct to account for his awful sufferings, they felt that he was hiding some secret defection, which they urged him to confess. Job felt that in all this they cruelly misunderstood him, and compares them in these words to one of the desert streams that are choked with ice and snow in the time of the winter rains, but dwindle and dry up on the first approach of summer. And when the weary caravans come to their banks, lo, their bed is a mere heap of stones. "They come thither and are confounded."

Is it not so with human friendships? We hoped that they would quench the raging thirst of our souls; this hope increases when they draw nigh us in days of sorrow; but how often they fail us — stones for bread, scorpions for fish, and scorching pebbles instead of water-brooks. How great a contrast to the love and friendship of Jesus! Not like a brook that dries in the time of drought, but like a well of water springing up within the heart for ever. He does not merely give consolation and sympathy, but He is what He gives. He imparts Himself. His promise chases away our fears as his Spirit reminds us of the words, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Nothing gives Him greater joy than to be the perfect circle of which earth's friendships are broken arcs.

What is man . . . that thou shouldest visit him every morning? [Job vii. 17, 18.](#)

GOD visits us with mercy every morning. Before we are awake He is at work in the world, baptizing it with dew, feeding the birds and wild things, taking pleasure in the jasmine and heliotrope, the honeysuckle, and the rose; and with all his care for his world, He does not forget man, whom He has placed there to be its tenant. There is no life so mean and abject, so suffering and wretched, that He does not visit in order to comfort and relieve it. No heart so forlorn that He does not knock at the door: no window so selfishly curtained and shuttered, at which He does not tap. "Open to Me!" the heavenly visitor entreats, "my love, my dove, my spouse!" Alas for us! that we keep the doors and windows closed to Him — as the poor widow to a beneficent friend, who called to relieve her, but she mistook him for the rent-collector.

But probably Job meant that God visits us in discipline, training, education. He is the watcher of men; not to detect their failures, but to discover opportunities of leading them on to richer, fuller experiences of his grace and life. Surely, as we consider all the time and pains which God has expended on us, we too may cry, with the patriarch, "What is man?" Man is more than we guess, else God would never take such time and pains with him. When a lapidary spends years over a single diamond, the most careless observer begins to appraise properly its intrinsic value.

Every morning God visits thee, with holy thoughts and warnings, with miracles and parables, with anticipations and forecasts — oh, realize how much thou art to Him: give Him love for love, thanks and loving recognition, a child's welcome and trust.

If thou wert pure and upright, surely now he would awake for thee. [Job viii. 6.](#)

SO Bildad spoke, suggesting that Job was not pure and upright, since God did not appear to deliver him. The premises from which he argued were that God always delivers and prospers pure and upright men, and that therefore, if a man were not delivered and prospered, he was proved to be neither pure nor upright. The fallacy lay in the premiss. It is not universally true that God delivers his saints from adverse circumstances, or prospers them with outward good. There have been in all ages thousands of devoted servants of God who have been destitute, afflicted, and tormented; and there are thousands of such to-day in prisons, in hospital wards, in every condition of privation and trial; but in none of these cases can there be the least imputation on the love and righteousness of God, nor necessarily on their fidelity and goodness.

God's arrangements for us are not governed by the superficial philosophy which would make material prosperity a sign of his favour, and adversity of his displeasure. There are many considerations beside. Our privations in the outward strengthen and ripen the inward. As the outward man decays, the inward is renewed day by day. We have to learn and manifest those passive virtues which can only mature in silence and sorrow. We must be taught to be largely independent of circumstances, and to find in God Himself the springs of unfailing supply. We must learn to carry the sentence of death in ourselves, that we may not trust in ourselves, but in the living God. We have to stiffer with and for others. All these things worketh God with us to make us partakers of his holiness. But amid all our sorrows, He is always awake for us.

Yet wilt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me. [Job ix. 31.](#)

WE shall never get beyond the need of using daily the Lord's prayer. He has bound by the conjunction and the prayer for forgiveness with that for daily bread, as though to teach us that we shall need the one as long as we need the other. At the end of the best day that we ever spent, when we are not aware of having consciously sinned in act, or speech, or thought, we shall still have need of the precious blood. We may know nothing against ourselves, yet we shall not be thereby justified; because He that judgeth us is our holy Lord, and the standard by which we are judged is his own perfect character. A piece of cambric looks extremely fine to the eye, but how coarse to the microscope! Sheep look white against the dark ground of the early spring; but how dark if there should be a fall of snow! Our characters seem stainless, only because we compare ourselves with ourselves, or with others.

But, when our eyes are opened to see God, to behold the whiteness of the great white throne, and we stand in the searching light of heaven, we are as those who have just emerged from a ditch. I heard the other day of a woman being proud of having lived without sin for ten years! So we deceive ourselves. No, at the best we are sinful men and women, needing constant cleansing; even though we may be kept from known sin by the grace of Christ. It was at an advanced period in the life of the great Apostle, and when he lived nearest God, that he realized himself to be the chief of sinners.

"I know not what I am, but only know
I have had glimpses tongue may never speak:
No more I balance human joy and woe,
But think of my transgressions, and am meek."

The land of darkness and the shadow of death. [Job x. 21.](#)

THIS represented the highest thinking of that age about the future. There were gleams now and again of something more; but they were fitful and uncertain, soon overtaken by dark and sad forebodings. How different to our happy condition, for whom death is abolished, whilst life and immortality have been brought to light! The patriarch called the present life Day, and the future Night. We know that in comparison the present is Night, and the future Day. "The night is far spent, the day is at hand; let us put on the armour of light."

For us, too, there is something better. We wait for his Son from heaven; we look for that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. "As the waters of the sea are held between two mighty gravitations, the moon now drawing them towards itself, and the earth drawing them back again, thus giving the ebbing and flowing tide, by which our earth is kept clean and healthful, so must the tides of the soul's affection move perpetually between the cross of Christ and the coming of Christ, influenced now by the power of memory and now by the power of hope." It is said of the late Dr. Gordon: "Hardly a sermon was preached without allusion to the glorious appearing. Never a day passed in which he did not prepare himself for it, in which its hastening was not sought for with prayer." "Yet a little while [*Greek*, how little! how little!] and He that shall come will come." The attitude of every believer should be that of waiting: with loins girt and lamp burning, let us be ready to meet our Lord.

"The Best is yet to be,
The Last for which the First was made."

Canst thou by searching find out God? [Job xi. 7.](#)

THERE is but one answer to that question. No one can. The very angels veil their faces before the insufferable glory of his face.

"The firstborn sons of light
Desire in vain his depths to see;
They cannot reach the mystery,
The length, and breadth, and height.

Do not be surprised, then, if there should be matters in the Bible, in your own life, and in the Providential government of the world, which baffle your thought. Remember you are only a little child in an infant class, and it is not likely that you can comprehend the whole system of your instructor. God would cease to be God to us, if we by searching could find Him out.

But though we cannot find out God by the searching of the intellect, we may know Him by love. "He that loveth, knoweth God; for God is Love." There is a way of knowing God, which is hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed to babes. Seek to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man. Let Christ dwell deep in your heart by faith. Take care to obey all his commandments, and then the Holy God will come into you, and abide. He will give you Himself, and you will know Him as a little child knows its parent, whom it cannot grasp with its mind, but loves and trusts and knows with its heart. We cannot find out God by searching, but we can by loving.

We can also find Him in the character and life of Jesus. He that hath seen Him hath seen the Father; why then ask to be shown the Father? "What is Thy name, mystery of strength and beauty?" "Shiloh, Rest-Giver," is the deep response.

Doth not the ear try words? and the palate tasteth its meat. [Job xii. 11](#) (R.V.).

THERE is no appeal from the verdict of our palate. We know in a moment whether a substance is sweet or bitter, palatable or disagreeable. Now, what the taste is to articles of diet, that the ear is to words, whether of God or man. More especially we can tell in a moment whether the fire of inspiration is burning in them. This is the test which Job proposed to apply to the words of his friends; and it would be well for all of us to apply the same test to Holy Scripture.

The humble student of the Word of God is sometimes much perplexed and cast down by the assaults which are made on it by scholars and teachers, who do not scruple to question the authorship and authority of large tracts of Scripture. We cannot vie with these in scholarship, but the humblest may apply the test of the purged ear; and it will detect a certain quality in the Bible which is absent everywhere beside. There is a tone in the voice of Scripture, which the child of God must recognise. This is the interesting characteristic in the quotations made in the New Testament from the Old. All the writers in the later Revelation detect the voice of God in the Old; to them, it is the Divine utterance through holy lips. Harken, they cry, "the holy Ghost saith." God is speaking in the prophets, as He spake in his Son.

It is one of the characteristics of Christ's sheep that they know his voice, and follow Him, whilst they flee from the voice of strangers. Ask that the Lord may touch your ears, that they may discern by a swift intuition the voice of the Good Shepherd from that of strangers; and for grace to follow immediately He calls you.

Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him. [Job xiii. 15.](#)

THIS was a noble expression, which has been appropriated by thousands in every subsequent age. In every friendship there is a probation, during which we narrowly watch the actions of another, as indicating the nature of his soul; but after awhile we get to such intimate knowledge and confidence, that we read and know his inner secret. We have passed from the outer court into the Holy Place of fellowship. We seem familiar with every nook and cranny of our friend's nature. And then it is comparatively unimportant how he appears to act; we know him.

So it is in respect of God. At first we know Him through the testimony of others, and on the evidence of Scripture; but as time passes, with its everdeepening experiences of what God is, with those opportunities of converse that arise during years of prayer and communion, we get to know Him as He is and to trust Him implicitly. And when that point has been reached and passed, nothing afterwards can greatly move us. Instead of looking at God from the standpoint of his acts, we look at his dealings with us and all men from the standpoint of his heart. Though He put us on the altar, as Abraham did Isaac, and take the knife to slay us, we trust Him. If we die, it is to pass into a richer life. If He seem to forget and forsake us, it is only in appearance. His heart is yearning over us more than ever. God cannot do a thing which is not perfectly loving and wise and good. Oh to know Him thus!

" Leaving the final issue In His hands

Whose goodness knows no change, whose love is sure,

Who sees, foresees, who cannot judge amiss."

All the days of my warfare would I wait, till my release should come. [Job xiv. 14](#) (R.V.).

THE Lord Jesus has chosen us to be his soldiers. We are in the midst of a great campaign: let us endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and strive above all things to please Him ([2 Tim. ii. 4](#)). Amongst other things, let us be sure not to entangle ourselves in the affairs of this life. What purpose could a soldier serve who insisted on taking all his household goods with him on the march!

There is no pause in the warfare. We can never, like Gideon's soldiers, throw ourselves on the bank and quaff the water at our leisure. Every bush may hide a sharp-shooter; every brake an ambuscade. It becomes us to watch and pray; to keep on our harness of armour; to be on the alert for our Captain's voice. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the hosts of wicked spirits in the heavenly places; we need to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might, and to take unto ourselves the whole armour of God, that we may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand.

But the release will come at last. When the soldier has fought the good fight, the time of his departure will come, and he will go in to receive the crown which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give in that day. "Come," said the dying Havelock to his son, "and see how a Christian can die." Sometimes it demands more of a soldier's courage to wait than to charge. Remember that long waiting on the field at Waterloo, when the day passed from morning to evening. If you can do nothing else, wait. Be steadfast, immovable: lying still to suffer, to bear, to endure. This is fighting of the noblest sort.

Thou restrainest prayer before God. [Job xv. 4.](#)

JOB'S friends were bent on discovering the cause of his sufferings in some secret failure and declension. This is why Eliphaz accused him so groundlessly. They did not know of those secret habits of intercession described in the first chapter. But this charge is eminently true of some professing Christians.

They restrain private prayer. — The closet door is too seldom shut behind them, or it is kept shut for too brief a period. They do not give themselves time to get into the mid-current of intercession and be borne forward by it whither it will. The voice of the Holy Spirit is barely able to assert itself amid the hubbub of voices within. They are so taken up with speaking of the Lord, or working for Him, that they slur over private audiences with Himself.

They restrain social prayer. — Their minister never sees them in the gatherings for intercession on behalf of the work of the Church and the salvation of the lost. They forsake the assembling of themselves with the saints. Like Thomas, they are absent from the gathering in the upper room, and miss the smile of the Lord.

They restrain family prayer. — Surely we ought to gather at least once a day around the family altar. Where Abraham pitched his tent he erected the altar. A prayerless home is apt to become a worldly and unhappy one. There is no such keystone to the arch of home-life and home-love, as the habit of family worship.

How foolish, how short-sighted, how sinful, it is to restrain prayer! What wonder that your soul is famished when you fail to feed it, or impoverished when you neglect intercourse with heaven!

I was at ease, and He brake me asunder. [Job xvi. 12](#) (R.V.).

THE other day, it was the Lord's Day morning, two sparrows fell from the leads of my church into the vestry, which has a lofty glass skylight. As soon as they had recovered from their astonishment at finding themselves prisoners, they flew up against this skylight as though to break through it to the open heaven, and then round and round the room. They were desperately afraid of myself and the verger, whom I had called, not realizing that we were as anxious as they to get them out again into the air. The only thing we could do to help them was to keep them from alighting to rest; so with long brooms and soft missiles we constantly drove them from every cornice and picture-frame on which they alighted, till they fell exhausted, and with panting breasts, to the ground. Then we captured them and set them free. They might have said many a time, in the course of that encounter, "We were at ease, and they brake us asunder; they also set us up for their mark." But if they could review that episode now, they would doubtless see that it was love which forbade them to rest anywhere in the vestry, because it desired to give them their fullest liberty.

So with Job. God would not allow him to rest in anything short of the best, and therefore He broke up his nest. Is not this the key to his dealings with you? Oh, believe that behind the perpetual change and displacement of your life God is leading you into the glorious liberty of his children!

"Therefore to whom turn I but Thee, the ineffable Name?
Builder and Maker Thou of houses not made with hands!
What? have fear of change from Thee who art ever the same?
Doubt that Thy power can fill the heart that Thy power expands?
There shall never be one lost good."

Yet shall the righteous hold on his way. [Job xvii. 9](#) (R.V.).

WHEN the real life of God enters the soul, it persists there. Genuine religion is shown by its power of persistence. Anything short of a Godgiven faith will sooner or later fail. It may run well for a time, but its pace will inevitably slacken till it comes to a stand. The youths faint and are weary, and the young men utterly fall. The seed sown on the rock springs up quickly, and as quickly dies down and perishes. But where there is the rooting and grounding in God, there is a perpetuity and persistence which outlives all storms and survives all resistance.

You shall hold on your way *because Jesus holds you* in his strong hand. He is your Shepherd; He has vanquished all your foes, and you shall never perish.

You shall hold on your way *because the Father has designed through you to glorify his Son*; and there must be no gaps in his crown where jewels ought to be.

You shall hold on your way *because the Holy Spirit has deigned to make you his residence and home*; and He is within you the perennial spring of a holy life.

It is said that there was once a debate in heaven, as to which kind of life needed most of God's grace. That of a man who after a lifetime of gross sins was converted at the eleventh hour, or of a man that for his whole career had been kept from destruction. And finally the latter was agreed to be the most conspicuous miracle. And there is no doubt that this is so. Yet for this also shall God's grace avail: and He shall enable thee to hold on thy way till heaven open to thee.

The king of terrors. [Job xviii. 14.](#)

SO the ancients spoke of death. They were constantly pursued by the dread of the unknown. Every unpeopled or distant spot was the haunt and dwellingplace of evil and dreadful objects. But the grave, and the world beyond, were above all terrible, and death the King of Terrors. It is difficult for us, who inherit centuries of Christian teaching, to realize how dark and fearsome was all the realm that lay under the dominion of death and the grave. What a shiver in those words, King of Terrors!

But for us how vast the contrast! Jesus has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light. He has gone through the grave, and come again to assure us that it is the back door into our Father's house, with its many mansions. At his girdle hang the keys of death and Hades; none can shut the door when He opens it, and none open when He keeps it shut. He was Himself dead; but He lives for evermore, and comes to the side of each dying saint to escort him through the valley to his own bright abode.

There is something better. In the case of immense numbers, who shall be alive and remain when He comes again, death will be entirely evaded. "He that liveth and believeth in Him shall never die." They shall be caught away to meet the Lord in the air. Suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, this mortal shall put on immortality, this corruptible incorruption. At his coming the grave shall be despoiled of its treasures, and death shall miss its expected prey.

" death, where is thy sting! grave, where is thy victory! Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I know that my Redeemer liveth. [Job xix. 25.](#)

THOSE words express the deepest and most radiant conviction of believing hearts. "He lives, the great Redeemer lives!" Man did his worst; the nail, the cross, the spear, were bitter; but He liveth! Death stood over Him as a vanquished foe; but He liveth! Captain Sepulchre and his henchman Corruption held earnest colloquy together about the best method of detaining Him; but He liveth! He ever liveth: and because He continueth ever, He hath an unchangeable priesthood.

But it is not probable that his words meant all this to Job. The word translated "Redeemer" is Goel — the nearest kinsman, sworn to avenge the wrongs of blood relations. This conception of the kinsman avenger has been always in vogue in the East, where the populations are scattered and migratory, and our system of law impossible. Beyond the heavens Job thought there lived a Kinsman, who saw all his sufferings, and pitied, and would one day appear on earth to vindicate his innocence and avenge his wrongs. He was content to leave the case with Him, sure that He would not fail, as his friends had done.

Beyond the sorrows and anguish of time he should yet see God; and he longed to see Him, that he might learn the secret purpose, which explained the sorrow of his lot. He had no dread of that momentous event, since his Goel would be there to stand beside him.

"Sudden the Worst turns the Best to the brave,
The black minute's at end!—
And the Elements' rage, the fiend voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become, — first a Peace out of Pain,
Then a Light, then thy breast."

This is the portion of a wicked man from God. [Job xx. 29.](#)

REPEATEDLY in reading this book we are reminded of the strong convictions entertained by thoughtful men among these Eastern peoples, of the sure connection between wrong-doing and its bitter penalty. The friends of the sufferer express their opinions in cold-blooded and unfeeling words; but we can detect their intense convictions beneath all — that special suffering indicates the presence of special sin, and that all wickedness is sooner or later brought to light and punished.

We are less able to follow the track of God's providences in these crowded, hurrying days; but there can be little doubt of the connection between wrong-doing and punishment. The law is immutable. As a man soweth, so shall he also reap. The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless but for a moment. He shall disgorge his wealth; he shall suck the poison of asps in the remorse and bitterness of his soul; the heavens shall reveal his iniquity; and his descendants shall seek favour of the poor. These things are still to be seen among us, in the rise and fall of proud men and their families.

Let us go into the sanctuary of God, and consider their latter end; and as we contrast it with that of the poorest of his children, we shall find no reason to envy them. Even though no human tribunal sentence them, they carry the harpoon in their heart, and sooner or later it will bring them to a certain and awful doom. It cannot be otherwise whilst God is God. The psalmist said:

"I have seen the wicked in great power,
And spreading himself like a green bay tree;
Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not."

Shall any teach God knowledge? [Job xxi. 22.](#)

WE cannot tell God anything He does not know already. The most fervent and full of our prayers simply unfold in word all that has been patent to his loving, pitying eye. This does not make prayer needless; on the contrary, it incites to prayer, since it is pleasant to talk with one who knows the whole case perfectly; and it is a relief to feel that God's answers depend — not on the information we bring Him, or even on the specific requests we make, but — on his infinite and perfect acquaintance with circumstances and conditions of which we are altogether ignorant.

"Your Father knoweth." Quicker than lightning is his notice of every transition in your inner life — of your downsittings and your uprisings; of every thought in your heart; every word on your tongue; of the fretting of that inward cross; of the anguish of that stake in your flesh; of the enemy that, like a sword in your bones, reproaches you with the derisive challenge. "Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, Lord, thou knowest it altogether." Yes, He knows it all, and loves you better than you know.

Do not presume to dictate to Him; do not dare to say that some other way would be better, some other lot more likely to develop your best self. He knows every track by which to bring sons to glory; and that He has chosen this one is a positive proof that it is the best, the one most adapted to your idiosyncrasies and needs. His ways are, higher than your ways, and his thoughts than your thoughts. You could not teach Him knowledge, or increase his love — then trust both.

If thou return to the Almighty. [Job xxii. 23.](#)

THESE words introduce a most exquisite picture of the blessings consequent on return to God. They do not fit the case of Job, to whom they were addressed, because he had not left God; and they sound strange as coming from the mouth of Eliphaz. Still they are full of sublime truth.

There are three conditions. — We must retrace the steps of our backsliding and wandering lives. We must put away unrighteousness from our home-life and business engagements, so that the tent may be free from idols. We must be content to lay our most treasured possessions in the dust at God's feet for Him to deal with as He pleases.

There are four consequences. — Whatever we give up for God, we shall find again in Him; He shall become our treasure. Prayer shall have new zest, new success; be full of delight; become the interchange of face-to-face fellowship. There shall be more certainty and permanence in our decisions and achievements. Our decrees shall stand, our work shall last, our path shall be illumined with light. Trouble and trial shall depress us for only a brief space, like the passing of an Atlantic breaker over a lighthouse rock, whilst a glad relief shall always follow close on disaster.

Let us ask for all this in our daily prayer. God, be *my* precious silver; give *me* delight in Thee; hear *my* prayers; may I decree what Thou canst establish; let Thy light shine on *my* ways; lift *me* up above all my depressions and fears — that I may stretch out a strong hand to those who are in trouble.

"Oh, strengthen me, that while I stand
Firm on the Rock, and strong In Thee,
I may stretch out a loving hand
To wrestlers with the troubled sea."

O that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to his seat! [Job xxiii. 3.](#)

POOR tempest-driven man, he knew not that God was intimately near, nearer than breathing. There was no need for him to go forward and backward, on the right hand or the left. The Lord his God was nigh him, even in his heart; for his throne was pitched there on the sands of the desert, between Job and his pitiless accusers.

Thou needest not speak like this. Thou knowest where to find Him; thou canst find the way to his seat. He is to be found in Jesus, seated on the mercy-seat; in that room where thou sittest reading these words; in that railway train or store. No need to ascend into heaven, or descend into the abyss. Thou couldst not be nearer God, if thou wert in heaven. True, the obscuring veil shall be then removed.

"And without a screen,

At one burst shall be seen,

The Presence in which we have ever been";

but the dropping- of the scales from our eyes will not make us nearer God than we are at this moment.

Now go to his seat, just in front of thee. Order thy cause before Him, and argue it. Wait to know the words with which He shall answer thee, and understand his reply. Only be sure that He will not contend against thee with his great power. Sometimes we are so bewildered and perplexed that we lose the realizing sense of God's presence; but there is no real difference. God is not really farther away; and nothing glorifies and pleases Him more than for us to go on speaking with Him as though we could see his face, and realize his embrace. Be still for a moment, and say, reverently and believingly: *Lo, God is in this place.*

Yet a little while, and they are gone. [Job xxiv. 24](#) (R.V.).

JOB here describes the insecurity of the wicked. He may have raged against the poor and innocent; but in a moment he comes down to Sheol, is hurried to stand before his Maker to receive his sentence. As he had treated the poor, so he is treated. As he had devoured the houses of the innocent, so he is devoured. "How are they become a desolation in a moment! They are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, Lord, when Thou awakest, Thou shalt despise their image."

For those who fear God there is a greatly contrasted lot. They receive a kingdom that cannot be moved. Zion may be a desolation, and Jerusalem a wilderness; the holy and beautiful institutions in which their early religious impressions were made may crumble; but they are come to the heavenly Jerusalem. The removing of those things that are capable of being shaken only makes more apparent those which cannot be shaken.

Where do you build your nest? In the trees of this world, that sway in the tempest, or may be hewn down by the woodman's axe; or have you learnt to build in the clefts of the Rock of Ages? Is your treasure in human friendships, which may change or be cut in twain by the sharp shears of death; or is it in the love of God, the unchangeable and everlasting Lover of souls? Let us look off from ourselves; from that diseased introspection that so confuses and dims our life; from the old fears that made us tremble and the old matters of which we must speak no more. And let us look upward and forward to that near future, which is so much larger and better than the past has been, and where we shall attain more than the heights of our dreams.

How then can man be just with God? [Job xxv. 4](#) (R.V.).

THIS is the question of the ages. Man knows that he is as a worm, and worse. For no animal, however humble, has consciously and determinedly broken the law of God, and defiled its nature.

Our first effort is to go about to establish a righteousness of our own. Repeated failure only aggravates our misery and chagrin, till we fall helpless at the foot of Sinai. Our vows are broken, the law of God lies shivered around us, the thunders and lightnings make us afraid. Then God in the Person of Jesus comes to our help. First, He meets and satisfies the demands of the broken law, so that it can ask no more. With his own hands He works out, and brings in, everlasting righteousness. And finally, He produces in us that faith by which his finished work is applied to our conscience and heart.

By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But we are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation. God is Himself the Justifier of the ungodly. "Whom He called, them He also justified." He takes off the filthy garments, and clothes us in change of raiment.

But the condition is *faith*. We must believe in Him who justifieth the ungodly. They who believe are justified from all things. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. We are not saved by believing about his work, but in Himself. The Greek of [John iii. 16](#) might be rendered, Whosoever even believeth into Him. The motion of faith is ever towards the heart of Him who died, and rose, and lives. Then through our faith the Spirit produces a holy character.

How small a whisper do we hear of Him! [Job xxvi. 14](#) (R.V.).

JOB in thought passes through the universe. Sheol stands for the grave and the unseen world; Abaddon, for Satan, or for the great reservoirs in which the destructive agencies of creation have their home. With a marvellous anticipation of the conclusions of modern science, he speaks of the world as pendant in space. He passes to the confines of light and darkness, rides on the wings of the wind, discourses of the clouds, skims the mighty surface of the sea. All this, however, he deems as the outskirts of God's ways. It is but a whisper compared to the mighty thunder of his glory and power. If this is a whisper, what must the thunder be! If this universe is but a flower on the meadows of God's life, what must not God Himself be!

Perhaps we know something more of the thunder of his power than Job could, because we have stood beneath Calvary and seen Jesus die, and He is the wisdom and power of God; yea, we have witnessed the exceeding greatness of his power, according to the working of the strength of his might, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead.

Who of us can fathom or understand the power of God? But what a comfort to know that it is an attribute of his heart. God is not power, but He is love, and his love throbs through and commands his power. Be reverent when you kneel before the great and mighty God; but believe that all his power is engaged on the side of his weakest, neediest child. And more: cease not to wait upon God until He endue you with his mighty power, for service and for daily living. A Nasmyth hammer can break a nutshell without crushing or touching the kernel.

My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let go. [Job xxvii. 6.](#)

JOB had an ideal and clung to it. Have you such? A vision of what you may be, and, by the grace of God, will aim at being. Bishop Westcott says: — "The vision of the ideal guards monotony of work from becoming monotony of life." Bitter indeed is life for those who have not seen the heavenly vision, or heard the calling upward of the voice that says, Come up hither. Any life looks more interesting and attractive when the light of our ideal falls on it, and we realize that every yard leads somewhere, and every step is one nearer the goal. So some one has suggested that "If we cannot realize our ideal, we may at least idealize our real."

But there are many hindrances, many adverse influences to combat, many suggestions that we should let go our ideal. We have so often failed, slipped where we thought we should stand, limped where we thought to overcome by wrestling. The crags are so steep, the encouragement we receive from fellow-climbers so scant, the dissuasions and misconstructions — like those Job had from his friends — so many. But Jesus who inspired the ideal waits to realize it, if only you will open your heart and let Him enter. Do you hunger and thirst? then He will satisfy. He does not tantalize and disappoint the seeking soul.

"Have we not all, amid life's petty strife,
Some pure ideal of a noble life
That once seemed possible? It was. And yet
We lost it in this daily jar and fret,
And now live idle in a vague regret.
but still our place is kept, and it will wait.
Ready for us to fill it, soon or late:
No star is ever lost we once have seen —
We always may be what we might have been.

The deep saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me. [Job xxviii. 14](#) (R.V.).

In this sublime chapter the holy soul goes in quest of wisdom, which is the perfect balance of the moral and intellectual attributes of the soul; that knowledge of God, and life, and truth, which is only possible when the eyes of the heart have been enlightened to know; that radiancy of spirit which is enlightened and illuminated with God who is Himself the Light.

In a marvellous description of mining operations, which would arrest any company of miners in the world, if read from the Revised Version, Job declares it is not to be found in the deep. From one quarter of the universe after another, he receives the intelligence that it is not there. God alone has the secret; He only can communicate it, or give the disposition to appreciate and receive.

We must deal with God. Looking away from every other source of illumination and satisfaction, we must have close and searching fellowship with Him. Dr. Gordon was wont to say that evangelical faith consists not in a glance alone, but in a gaze. "We live in a very busy, perspiring time, when a thousand clamant calls assail us on every side; but we must have more time for visions if we would be well equipped for our tasks." Let us then turn from the quarters where we have been accustomed to draw our supplies — broken cisterns, with uncertain and brackish water — and let us come to God, the eternal source of life and peace. Love and rest we want, Thy love and rest, oh, give us! From men and things; from the mine, the deep, and the sea; from the murmur of human voices, and the crosslights of human interests, we come back to Thee, our Home.

Oh that I were as in the months of old! [Job xxix. 2](#) (R.V.).

WE are irresistibly reminded of Cowper's sad complaint: —

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!

How sweet their memory still;

But they have left an aching void

The world can never fill."

We are all prone to think that the earliest days were the best; and it is quite possible they were. But we must carefully distinguish between the exchange of the freshness and novelty of our first love for a deepening and maturing love, and the loss of love. The streamlet may not babble so cheerily, but there may be more water in the river. We lose the green Spring, but is it not better to have the intense light of Autumn in which the fruits ripen? There may not be so much ecstasy, but there may be stronger, deeper experience. We should not reckon our position in God's sight by our raptures, and count ourselves retrograding because they have gone; there is something better than rapture: the peace of a settled understanding and unvarying faith.

Still, if it be really so, that you have left the old place on the bosom or at the feet of Christ, that your love is cooling and your spirituality waning, I beseech thee, get back! Remember whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works. Jesus yearns to reinstate thee, and has permitted this restless longing for the past to come, that it may be with thee as in the months of old. Again his lamp shall shine above thy head, and the secret of the Lord shall be upon thy tent; thy steps shall be washed with butter, and the rock pour out rivers of oil; thy roots shall spread to the waters, and the dew shall lie all night upon thy branch.

I cry unto Thee, and Thou dost not answer me. [Job xxx. 20](#) (R.V.).

IT may have seemed so to the sufferer; but there is not a cry that goes from the anguished soul which does not ring a bell in the very heart of God, where the Man of Sorrows waits, touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

I have sometimes gone to a telephone office, and have rung the bell, asking to be put in connection with my friend, but it has seemed impossible to get at him; either he has been engaged or absent, and one has found oneself speaking to a stranger, and the voice which replied has been unfamiliar. Thoroughly disappointed, one turns away. But this is never the case with God. And the comfort is, that He is most quick to succour those whose cry is lowest. As a mother goes about her work, she is less sensitive to the trains that thunder past, and the heavy drays, and the laughter of boisterous health, than to the stifled cry of her little invalid; and if there could be one thing more sure than another of awakening God's immediate response, it would be such broken cries as pain elicited from Job.

But the answer will come — nay, it is on its way, timed to arrive in the fourth watch of the night. Perhaps the delay is the answer, because the heart needs to be prepared to receive the great gift when it comes. Perhaps, like the Syrophenician woman, you have to give Christ his right place as Lord, and take yours amongst the dogs. Perhaps the answer is coming all the time by one door, whilst you are looking for it through another; but you cannot and must not say that God is not answering. All the time you are crying, the answer is to your hand, awaiting your appropriation. Go to the post-office for the letter: hasten to the landing-stage for the ship — it is in.

Mine integrity. [Job xxxi. 6.](#)

INTEGRITY is from the Latin word *integrita*, wholeness. It means whole-heartedness. It is interesting in this chapter to see what, in Job's estimation, it involved.

v.1. Purity in the look.

v.7. Cleanliness of the hands.

v.13. Thoughtfulness for domestic servants and underlings.

v.16. Justice to the poor and the widow.

v.17. Willingness to share morsels, and to be a father to the fatherless.

v.19, 20. Clothing for the naked.

v.21. The refusal to depute to others help which one might render.

v.24.. The heart weaned from the love of gold.

v.26. Refusal to turn aside to idols.

v.29. Inability to rejoice at the destruction of those who had derided and hated.

v. 33. The frank confession of wrong-doing.

It becomes us prayerfully to go over these items, and use them as the catechism of our soul; for if this was the standard of character for one who lived so many centuries before the full revelation of Christ, what should not our standard be! How impossible, however, it is to live like this from without! We must enshrine within us the blessed Spirit of God, who alone originates and maintains that perfect love to God and man which compared to Job's maxims is as the heart to the body. Law is given as the expression of God's will for the regulation of life: but it is impossible to keep the law till we have the love; and it is impossible to have the love until we have the Lord Jesus Christ, through the Holy Ghost.

There is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty giveth understanding. [Job xxxii. 8](#) (R.V.).

ELIHU had waited whilst the three elder men said all that was in their hearts. He now excuses his youth and demands audience, because so conscious that the breath of inspiration had entered his soul. Wisdom is not with age; but wherever the heart is freely open to God, He will make it wise. We have received not the spirit which is of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we may know.

George Fox tells us that though he read the Scriptures which spoke of Christ and of God, yet he knew Him not till He who had the key did open. "Then the Lord gently led me along and let me see his love which was endless and eternal, surpassing all the knowledge that men have in the natural state, or can get by history or books. I had not fellowship with any people, priests or professors, but with Christ, who hath the key, and opened the door of life and light unto me. His one message was the necessity of the Inner Light, the inward witness of the Spirit, his secret revelations of truth to the soul. "

This distinction needs to be deeply pondered. We have been trying to know God by the intellect, by reading the Bible intellectually, by endeavouring to apprehend human systems. There is, however, a deeper and truer method. "There is a spirit in man!" Open your spirit to the Divine Spirit as you open a window to the sunny air. Instantly God enters and fills. The Spirit witnesses with our spirit. The inbreathed life of God gives us light. We know by intuition, by fellowship with God, by direct vision, what the wise of this world could never discover.

If there be with him a messenger, an interpreter. [Job xxxiii. 23.](#)

GOD is greater than man, and by his love seeks to hold man back from his purpose. Sometimes He comes in the visions of the night; sometimes in pain and sickness. But we are too dull to understand the inner reason of God's endeavours to deliver us from the brink of destruction; and therefore we need an interpreter, one among a thousand, to explain the meaning of his dealings, and to show us the way in which we should amend our ways. How often has the sick visitor, the minister, the friend, interpreted God's purpose, enabling us to see light in his light. There are few higher offices in this world than to act in this way between God and our fellows.

To perform this function, however, we need to understand two languages; the one of the throne, obtained from deep and intimate converse with our Father, while the other is man's native language of pain and sorrow. Each must be spoken perfectly before we can interpret: —

"And to the height of this great argument
Assert eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to man."

But, as Bunyan truly says, the best Interpreter is the Holy Spirit. As soon as the Pilgrim has passed the Wicket-gate, he is conducted through the Interpreter's house by the Interpreter Himself. Are you perplexed as to the meaning of God's Word, the dealings of God's providence, the mystery of God's moral government? Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you through chamber after chamber, unfolding to you the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. They are for babes — for the childlike and pure in heart. He will show you wondrous things out of his law.

He giveth quietness. [Job xxxiv. 29.](#)

QUIETNESS amid the accusations of Satan. — The great accuser points to the stains of our past lives, by which we have defiled our robes and those of others; he says that we shall fall again and again; he imputes evil motives to our holiest actions, and detects flaws in our most sacred services; he raises so great a hubbub that we can hardly hear another voice within our souls. Then the great Intercessor arises and saith, "The Lord rebuke thee, Satan; the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: I have loved with an everlasting love, I have paid the ransom. So "He giveth quietness."

Quietness amid the dash of the storm. — We sail the lake with Him still, and as we reach its middle waters, far from land, under midnight skies, suddenly a great storm sweeps down. Earth and hell seem arrayed against us, and each billow threatens to overwhelm. Then He arises from his sleep, and rebukes the winds and the waves; his hand waves benediction and repose over the rage of the tempestuous elements. His voice is heard above the scream of the wind in the cordage and the conflict of the billows. Peace, be still! Can you not hear it? And there is instantly a great calm. "He giveth quietness."

Quietness amid the loss of inward consolations. — He sometimes withdraws these, because we make too much of them. We are tempted to look at our joy, our ecstasies, our transports, or our visions, with too great complacency. Then love, for love's sake, withdraws them. But, by his grace, He leads us to distinguish between them and Himself. He draws nigh, and whispers the assurance of his presence. Thus an infinite calm comes to keep our heart and mind. "He giveth quietness."

None saith, Where is God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night? [Job xxxv. 10.](#)

DO you have sleepless nights, tossing on the hot pillow, and watching for the first glint of dawn? Ask the Divine Spirit to enable you to fix your thoughts on God, your Maker, and believe that He can fill those lonely, dreary hours with song.

Is yours the night of doubt? — A holy man tells us that once as he was sitting by the fire, a great cloud came over him, and a temptation beset him to think that all things came by nature; and as he sat still under it, and let it alone, a living hope arose in him, and a true voice said, "There is a living God who made all things." And immediately the cloud and temptation vanished away, and life rose over it all. His heart was glad, and he praised the living God. Was not this a song in the night?

Is yours the night of bereavement? — Is it not often to such God draws near, and assures the mourner that the Lord had need of its beloved, and called "the eager, earnest spirit to stand in the bright throng of the invisible, liberated, radiant, active, intent on some high mission"; and as the thought enters, is there not the beginning of a song?

Is yours the night of discouragement and fancied or actual failure? — No one understands you, your friends reproach; but your Maker draws nigh, and gives you a song — the song of hope, the song which is harmonious with the strong, deep music of his providence. Be ready to sing the songs that your Maker gives.

"What then? Shall we sit idly down and say

"The night hath come; it is no longer day'?

.....

Yet as the evening twilight fades away,

The sky is filled with stars, invisible to day."

Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any. [Job xxxvi. 5.](#)

WHAT entrancing assurances are contained in this and the preceding sentence! To think that in all our wayfarings through this world One that is perfect in knowledge is always with us, and One that is mighty is pledged to bring us through! Nothing could be desired beside. This makes prayer new. It is a child's confidential whisper to the One who is attent to the lowest murmur, who cannot forget, who will not relinquish a purpose which He has formed though years pass, and who is able to do exceeding abundantly.

It is because God is so great that He despises none. If He were less than infinite, He might overlook. The boundlessness of his being has no ebb, fails of no soul He has made, and is as much at any one point as if He had no care or thought beside. In fact, those that man despises stand the best chance with God. Just because no one else cares for them, he must; just because no one else will help them, He will. This is necessary to his nature.

When a philanthropist adopts a certain lapsed section of the community, he does so because no one else will. It becomes a matter of honour with him that none of these, outcast by all else, should miss his help. And God has constituted Himself Champion, Guardian, and Saviour, of all who have no help from their fellows. Friendless, forlorn, helpless, despised, He recognises and meets the claim of their urgent necessity. Bruised reeds, bits of smoking tow, half-consumed fire-brands, lost sheep, prodigal sons, waifs and strays, homeless, destitute, neglected — these have a first claim on the Almightyness of the living God.

Men see not the bright light which is in the clouds. [Job xxxvii. 21.](#)

THE world owes much of its beauty to cloudland. The unchanging blue of the Italian sky hardly compensates for the changefulness and glory of the clouds. Clouds also are the cisterns of the rain. Earth would become a wilderness apart from their ministry. There are clouds in human life, shadowing, refreshing, and sometimes draping it in blackness of night; but there is never a cloud without its bright light. "I do set my bow in the cloud! "

If only we could see the clouds from the other side where they lie in billowy glory, bathed in the light they intercept, like heaped ranges of Alps, we should be amazed at their splendid magnificence. We look at their under side; but who shall describe the bright light that bathes their summits, and searches their valleys, and is reflected from every pinnacle of their expanse? Is not every drop drinking in health-giving qualities, which it will carry to the earth?

child of God! If you could see your sorrows and troubles from the other side; if instead of looking up at them from earth, you would look down on them from the heavenly places where you sit with Christ; if you knew how they are reflecting in prismatic beauty before the gaze of heaven, the bright light of Christ's face — you would be content that they should cast their deep shadows over the mountain slopes of existence. Only remember that clouds are always moving, and passing before God's cleansing wind.

"Green pastures are before me, which yet I have not seen;
Bright skies will soon be o'er me, where the dark clouds have been:
My hope I cannot measure, my path of life is free;
My Saviour hath my treasure, and He will walk with me."

Canst thou bind the cluster of the Pleiades? [Job xxxviii. 31](#) (R.V.).

THE seven stars of the Pleiades always stand for the sweet influences of spring; Orion for the storm and tempest. In this sublime catechism, Jehovah asks Job if he has any control over the One or the other. As it is with the year, so with our life.

There are times when the PLEIADES are in the ascendant. The winter is over and gone, the time of the singing of birds is come. Doves coo their love notes in the trees, and the flowers gem the soil. Days of hope, of radiant light, of ecstatic joy! Days in which God seems to be making a new heaven and a new earth within us! Days when our Beloved shows Himself through the lattice-work, and says, "Come, my beloved!" Oh, tender influences of the Pleiades, we would that ye might ever stay, filling us with immortal youth! When God bids them shine, no one can bind them. When He gives joy, none can give sorrow. No mortal man can restrain the outburst of Nature's spring. You might as well stay the resurrection of the Son of God and his saints!

But ORION has his work as well. Storms come; the drenching rain veils the landscape; the mighty billows are lashed to fury. But all works for good. The blast in the forest snaps off dead wood. The rain fills up the wells. Frost pulverises the earth. When God binds Orion, man cannot unloose him; "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." But when the Almighty unlooses Orion, like another Samson, he does his work of devastation, before which we must find refuge in the cleft of the Rock.

"God sendeth sun,
He sendeth shower,
Alike they're needful for the flower."

Knowest thou? [Job xxxix. 1.](#)

THE catechism of this chapter is designed to convince man of his ignorance. How little he knows of nature! Even though centuries of investigation and research have passed, there are still many questions which baffle us. And if we know so little of the Creator's handiwork, how much less do we know of Himself, or the principles on which He acts!

The knowledge of God is not intellectual, but moral and spiritual. Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, are made known to Love and Obedience. Let the Love of God be shed through the heart, and the will of God be the ruling principle of life, and there will be given a knowledge of God which the research of the investigator could never gain. "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given us of God . . . they are spiritually discerned." Knowest thou?

Dost thou know the exceeding greatness of his power, which He wrought in the Resurrection of thy Lord — that it is all around thee waiting to do as much for thee also; lifting thee, dead weight as thou art, to sit in the heavenlies?

Dost thou know the hope of his calling to a life within the veil, with the veil behind thee, and the light of the Shekinah ever on thy face?

Dost thou know the riches of his glorious indwelling, that He is prepared so to infill thee, that thou shalt partake of the very life wherewith He liveth and reigneth evermore?

Dost thou know the length, and breadth, and depth, and height, of the love that passeth knowledge; and Christ Jesus the Lord?

I am of small account; what shall I answer Thee? I lay mine hand upon my mouth. [Job xl. 4.](#)

WHAT a different tone is here! This is he who so vehemently protested his innocence, and defended himself against the attacks of his accusers. The Master is come, and the servant who had contended with his fellows takes a lowly place of humility and silence.

The first step in the noblest life, possible to any of us, is to learn and say that we are of small account. We may learn it by successive and perpetual failures which abash and confound us. It is better to learn it by seeing the light of God rise in majesty above the loftiest of earth's mountains. "When I was young," said Gounod to a friend, "I used to talk of 'I and Mozart.' Later I said, 'Mozart and I.' But now I only say 'Mozart.'" Substitute *God*, and you have the true story of many a soul.

The next step is to choke back words, and lay the hand on the mouth. Silence and meditation! Not arguing or contending! Not complaining or murmuring! Not cavilling or criticising! But just being still — still, that you may feel God near; still, that you may hear Him speak. "Take heed of many words," said George Fox; "keep down, keep low, that nothing may reign in you but life itself."

The greatest saints avoided, when they could, the society of men, and did rather choose to live to God, in secret. A certain one said, "As oft as I have been among men I returned home less a man than I was before. Shut thy door upon thee, and call unto Jesus, thy Beloved. Stay with Him in thy closet, for thou shalt not find elsewhere so great peace." How good it would be to lay our hands on our mouths rather oftener, whether in silence with our fellows, or in the hour of secret prayer!

Who then is he that can stand before Me? [Job xii. 10](#) (R.V.).

THE first catechism had been on Job's knowledge; now it turns on his power. The pivot of the one was, *Knowest thou?* of the other, *Canst thou?* If a man cannot stand before one of God's creatures, how much less before the Creator! If we dread the wrath of the enraged crocodile, what should not be our dread before the wrath of the Eternal? Canst thou stand before Him? Canst thou strive against Him, with any hope of success? Canst thou force thyself, unbidden and unfit, into the presence of the Most Holy? Thou couldst not intrude on an earthly sovereign; how much less on Him, in whose sight the heavens are not clean?

"Eternal light! eternal light!
how pure the soul must be,
When placed within thy searching light,
It shrinks not, but with calm delight
Can live, and look on Thee!"

But Jesus can make it possible. Through Him we draw nigh to God. We have boldness to enter into the Holiest of All by his Blood. We may, through Him, be able to say, with Elijah, "Thus saith Jehovah, before whom I stand." Jesus is the minister of the heavenly sanctuary, and in virtue of his office He is able to bring us into, and maintain us within, the Most Holy Place. He comes out to take us by the hand; and then, having fulfilled in us the good pleasure of his will, He brings us in and places us before the face of God for ever. Like Solomon's servants, we evermore stand before the king, see his face, and hear his words.

"The sons of ignorance and night
May dwell in the Eternal Light,
Through the Eternal Love."

Now mine eye seeth Thee: wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. [Job xiii. 5, 6.](#)

THIS is the clue to the entire book. Here is a man, who was universally known as perfect and upright, one that feared God, and eschewed evil; who abounded in beneficent and loving ministries to all who were in need; to whom respect and love flowed in a full tide. He was not conscious of any failure in perfect obedience, or of secret sin; indeed, when his friends endeavoured to account for his unparalleled calamities by suggesting that there was some discrepancy between his outward reputation and inward consistency, he indignantly repelled the charge, and repudiated the impeachment.

Indexes

Index of Scripture References

Leviticus

20:24 20:26

Numbers

14:34

Deuteronomy

17:17

1 Samuel

1:15 2:19 3:10 4:3 5:3 6:12 7:8 8:6 9:6 10:7 11:14 12:22 13:12 14:27 15:22
16:13 17:26 17:36 18:5 18:14 18:15 18:30 19:6 20:14-16 20:18 21:9 22:3 23:9
24:5 25:31 26:21 27:1 28:18 29:3 30:6 31:11-12

2 Samuel

1:23 2:4 3:1 4:9 5:13 6:3 7:25 8:11 9:7 10:12 11:1 12:29 13:31 14:14 15:26
16:14 17:21 18:22-23 19:42 20:2 21:1 22:36 23:4 24:24

1 Kings

1:29 2:4 3:13 4:29 5:4 6:7 7:46 8:59 9:3 10:9 11:4 12:33 13:21-22 14:5 15:11
16:33 17:4 17:9 18:42 19:5 20:40 21:20 22:34

2 Kings

1:9 1:11 1:13 2:2 2:4 2:6 3:17 4:6 5:14 6:17 7:9 8:11 9:22 10:31 11:12 12:4
13:18 14:6 15:9 15:18 15:24 15:28 16:10 17:41 18:20 19:14 20:10 21:1 22:20
23:25 24:13 25:30

1 Chronicles

1:1 2:1 3:1 4:9 5:20 6:33 7:23 8:33-34 9:22 9:29 9:31 9:33 10:13 11:17 12:38
13:12 14:15 15:22 16:9 17:23-24 18:73 19:13 20:1 21:8 22:9-10 23:13 24:5 25:5-6
26:1 27:31 28:20 29:15

2 Chronicles

1:11-12 2:11 3:17 4:18 5:13 6:27 7:1 8:11 9:1 10:15 11:16 12:14 13:14 14:11
15:12 16:9 16:12 17:6 18:7 19:2 20:21 21:10 21:10 22:12 23:21 24:20 25:9
25:11-14 26:15-16 27:6 28:15 29:27 30:18-19 31:21 32:20 33:12 34:15 34:18 35:4
35:6 35:10 35:14 35:15 35:16 35:20-22 36:15

Ezra

1:1 2:63 3:3 4:2 5:5 5:14 6:22 7:28 8:29 8:33 9:1 10:4

Nehemiah

1:11 2:4 3:28 4:14 5:15 6:3 7:64 8:10 9:2 10:39 11:23 12:24 12:36 12:37 12:45
12:46 13:14 13:22 13:31

Esther

1:22 2:7 3:2 4:14 5:2 6:10 7:2 8:8 9:1 10:3

Job

1:5 2:3 3:1 4:5 5:18 6:15 7:17-18 8:6 9:31 10:21 11:7 12:10 12:11 13:5-6 13:15
14:14 15:4 16:12 17:9 18:14 19:25 20:29 21:22 22:23 23:3 24:24 25:4 26:14 27:6
28:14 29:2 30:20 31:6 32:8 33:23 34:29 35:10 36:5 37:21 38:31 39:1 40:4

Psalms

37:3-7 51 137:7

Isaiah

32:2 38 45:1 45:13

Luke

1:19

John

3:16

Acts

1:8 2 13:22

Romans

1 6:11 6:17 7

1 Corinthians

9 10:17

2 Corinthians

5:14-15 10:1

Ephesians

2:5

1 Timothy

3:4-5

2 Timothy

1:12 1:12 1:14 1:14 2:4 3:2-3

Hebrews

1:3 7:25 8 8

1 John

1:9 3:2 5:4

Index of Scripture Commentary

1 Samuel

1:15 2:19 3:10 4:3 5:3 6:12 7:8 8:6 9:6 10:7 11:14 12:22 13:12 14:27 15:22
16:13 17:26 17:36 18:5 18:14 18:15 18:30 19:6 20:18 21:9 22 23:9 24:5 25:31
26:21 27:1 28:18 29:3 30:6 31:11-12

2 Samuel

1:23 2:4 3:1 4:9 5:13 6:3 7:25 8:11 9:7 10:12 11:1 12:29 13:31 14:14 15:26
16:14 17:21 18:22-23 19:42 20:2 21:1 22:36 23:4 24:24

1 Kings

1:29 2:4 3:13 4:29 5:4 6:7 7:46 8:59 9:3 10:9 11:4 12:33 13:21-22 14:5 15:11
16:33 17:4 17:9 18:42 19:5 20:40 21:20 22:34

2 Kings

1:9 1:11 1:13 2:2 2:4 2:6 3:17 4:6 5:14 6:17 7:9 8:11 9:22 10:31 11:12 12:4
13:18 14:6 15:9 15:18 15:24 15:28 16:10 17:41 18:20 19:14 20:10 21:1 22:20
23:25 24:13 25:30

1 Chronicles

1:1 2:1 3:1 4:9 5:20 6:33 7:23 8:33-34 9:22 9:29 9:31 9:33 10:13 11:17 12:38
13:12 14:15 15:22 16:9 17:23-24 18:73 19:13 20:1 21:8 22:9-10 23:13 24:5 25:5-6
26:1 27:31 28:20 29:15

2 Chronicles

1:11-12 2:11 3:17 4:18 5:13 6:27 7:1 8:11 9:1 10:15 11:16 12:14 13:14 14:11
15:12 16:9 17:6 18:7 19:2 20:21 21:10 22:12 23:21 24:20 25:9 26:15-16 27:6
28:15 29:27 30:18-19 31:21 32:20 33:12 34:15 34:18 35:4 35:6 35:10 35:14 35:15
35:16 36:15

Ezra

1:1 2:63 3:3 4:2 5:5 6:22 7:28 8:29 9:1 10:4

Nehemiah

1:11 2:4 3:28 4:14 5:15 6:3 7:64 8:10 9:2 10:39 12:24 12:36 12:37 12:45 12:46
13:14 13:22 13:31

Esther

1:22 2:7 3:2 4:14 5:2 6:10 7:2 8:8 9:1 10:3

Job

1:5 2:3 3:1 4:5 5:18 6:15 7:17-18 8:6 9:31 10:21 11:7 12:10 12:11 13:5-6 13:15
14:14 15:4 16:12 17:9 18:14 19:25 20:29 21:22 22:23 23:3 24:24 25:4 26:14 27:6
28:14 29:2 30:20 31:6 32:8 33:23 34:29 35:10 36:5 37:21 38:31 39:1 40:4