

Our Daily Homily

By

F.B. Meyer

VOLUME Eight

Preface

With the issue of this volume of "Our Daily Homily," the top stone is placed on a structure which has occupied many of my brightest hours for more than three years.

Amid the pressure of a busy life, and the inevitable demands of a considerable church-organization, it has been an untold refreshment to turn to the devout study of successive chapters of the Bible, with the view of obtaining a message for oneself, and to pass on to others.

We must all have our "Temple of Peace"; and if this may not be a spacious and well-stocked library, it may at least be that collection of sacred literature which contains the noblest thoughts of the holiest men, inbreathed and borne along by the Spirit of God. Here is the secret of serenity, the treasure of tranquillity, the clue to perennial comfort.

It has been impossible altogether to exclude the personal element from these pages, because the sheets have been printed from the types of my own daily experience, set up by the many altering circumstances of joy and grief, conflict and peace, which befall each of us. But the one refrain has been the reality of the unseen; the nearness of God; the vindication of the Christian, as the only true policy of life; the duty and blessedness of doing all God commands, and bearing all He permits; the uplifting and light-bringing power of simple trust in Him who liveth, and was dead, and who is alive forevermore.

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.

Note: This devotional can be accessed at: www.lifebpc.com/devotions
It is also available for downloading on to Palm handheld devices.

FREDERICK BROTHERTON MEYER (1847–1929)

*British preacher, author, and
spokesman for public righteousness*



Meyer's ministry was worldwide, but his base was London. He was born and educated there, held pastorates at some of London's largest free churches, and conducted his moral crusades from that city.

An ardent Baptist and premillennialist, Meyer applied Christian principles to social ills such as drunkenness, prostitution, unmarried mothers, and unwanted children. One of his best crusades occurred in 1911 when he

successfully stopped a prize fight that was to be held at Earl's Court between Jack Johnson of the United States and a British contender. Meyer endured scorn for his efforts: a London newspaper called him "Meddling, Maudlin Meyer."

Meyer was involved in the Blue Ribbon movement (prohibition); the Purity, Rescue, and Temperance work of the Central South London Free Church Council (which closed brothels and counseled prostitutes); and the Homeless Children's Aid and Adoption Society. He served as president of the National and World Sunday School Unions, president of the National Union of Christian Endeavor, and founder of South London Missionary Training College. He was also the author of more than seventy books. He preached around the world. Melbourne Hall (Leicester), a center of social and evangelistic activity, was built in 1881 under his leadership.

- *Who's Who In Christian History* - Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

2 Chronicles 13:14

“And when Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind: and they cried unto the LORD, and the priests sounded with the trumpets.”

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 reinforcements 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.

 2 Chronicles 14:11

“And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee.”

REMIND *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 we go against this multitude ... let not man prevail against thee.” It is a great matter when a small State is so identified with a strong European power, 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.

2 Chronicles 15:12

“And they entered into a covenant to seek the LORD God of their fathers with all their heart and with all their soul;”

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 8. 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.

2 Chronicles 16:9

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him. Herein thou hast done foolishly: therefore from henceforth thou shalt have wars.”

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.

2 Chronicles 17:6

“And his heart was lifted up in the ways of the LORD: moreover he took away the high places and groves out of Judah.”

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, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. ... Let not mine enemies triumph over me!” (Psalm 25:1-2)

2 Chronicles 18:7

“And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he never prophesied good unto me, but always evil: the same is Micaiah the son of Imla. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say so.”

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.” (John 15:20)

2 Chronicles 19:2

“And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Shouldest thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the LORD? therefore is wrath upon thee from before the LORD.”

THIS looks back to 2 Chronicles 18:1, 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.” (2 Chronicles 18:3) 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.

2 Chronicles 20:21

“And when he had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the LORD, and that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the LORD; for his mercy endureth for ever.”

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!"

2 Chronicles 21:10

“So the Edomites revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day. The same time also did Libnah revolt from under his hand; because he had forsaken the LORD God of his fathers.”

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 people 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, having soldiers under me,” said the centurion. (Matthew 8:9)

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.

2 Chronicles 22:12

“And he was with them hid in the house of God six years: and Athaliah reigned over the land.”

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 film 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 daily cleansing, the light of the Shekinah, the holy psalm and song, the great altar of sacrifice, are familiar objects to the hidden soul.

2 Chronicles 23:21

“And all the people of the land rejoiced: and the city was quiet, after that they had slain Athaliah with the sword.”

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.

2 Chronicles 24:20

“And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, he hath also forsaken you.”

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 today? 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.

2 Chronicles 25:9

“And Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? And the man of God answered, The LORD is able to give thee much more than this.”

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. O 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 after consequences 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.

2 Chronicles 26:15,16

“And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by cunning men, to be on the towers and upon the bulwarks, to shoot arrows and great stones withal. And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense.”

GREAT and marvellous are thy works, O 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 hast 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.

2 Chronicles 27:6

“So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before the LORD his God.”

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.

2 Chronicles 28:15

“And the men which were expressed by name rose up, and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all that were naked among them, and arrayed them, and shod them, and gave them to eat and to drink, and anointed them, and carried all the feeble of them upon asses, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brethren: then they returned to Samaria.”

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.” (Romans 12:20)

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.

2 Chronicles 29:27

“And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel.”

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.

2 Chronicles 30:18,19

“For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good LORD pardon every one That prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary.”

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.

2 Chronicles 31:21

“And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered.”

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.

2 Chronicles 32:20

“And for this cause Hezekiah the king, and the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz, prayed and cried to heaven.”

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 (2 Chronicles 32:22). 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.

2 Chronicles 33:12

“And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers,”

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.” (2 Chronicles 33:2) 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.

2 Chronicles 34:15, 18

“And Hilkiyah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiyah delivered the book to Shaphan. ... Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiyah the priest hath given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king.”

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!

2 Chronicles 35:4, 6, 10, 14, 15, 16

“And prepare yourselves by the houses of your fathers, ...

So kill the passover, and sanctify yourselves, and prepare your brethren, that they may do according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses. ... So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their place, and the Levites in their courses, according to the king’s commandment. ... therefore the Levites prepared for themselves, and for the priests the sons of Aaron. ... for their brethren the Levites prepared for them. ... So all the service of the LORD was prepared the same day, to keep the passover, and to offer burnt offerings upon the altar of the LORD, according to the commandment of king Josiah.”

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, only then will we be prepared to do His will.

2 Chronicles 36:15

“And the LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place:”

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 a.m., he would rise at 4.

Ezra 1:1

“Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,”

THERE were many rays focused 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” (Isaiah 45:1, 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.

Ezra 2:63

“And the Tirshatha said unto them, that they should not eat of the most holy things, till there stood up a priest with Urim and with Thummim.”

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.

Ezra 3:3

“And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening.”

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.

Ezra 4:2

“Then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assur, which brought us up hither.”

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, O world, though thou deniest

Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.”

Ezra 5:5

“But the eye of their God was upon the elders of the Jews, that they could not cause them to cease, till the matter came to Darius: and then they returned answer by letter concerning this matter.”

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, “For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers; but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.” (Psalm 34:16; 1 Peter 3:12) And he goes on to argue, “Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?” (1 Peter 3:13) 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 worshippest at the temple’s inner shrine,
God being with thee when thou knowest not.”

Ezra 6:22

“And kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for the LORD had made them joyful, and turned the heart of the king of Assyria unto them, to strengthen their hands in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.”

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 makeweight. 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 hath given unto thee.” (Deuteronomy 26:11)

Ezra 7:28

“And hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counsellors, and before all the king’s mighty princes. And I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.”

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.

Ezra 8:29

“Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chief of the priests and the Levites, and chief of the fathers of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of the LORD.”

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 Timothy 1:12, 14. There are two deposits. 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 “keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us,” (2 Timothy 1:14) 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 Baptism—these are some of the vessels which have been passed down to us, and we must hang 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.

Ezra 9:1

“Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.”

THIS only too true! There had been, on the part of princes and rulers, gross intermarriage 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!

Ezra 10:4

“Arise; for this matter belongeth unto thee: we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.”

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 (*before*) 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, “we also will be with thee: be of good courage, and do it.” 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!

Nehemiah 1:11

“O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. For I was the king’s cupbearer.”

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!”

Nehemiah 2:4

*“Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request?
So I prayed to the God of heaven.”*

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 Nehemiah 1:11). 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.”

Nehemiah 3:28

“From above the horse gate repaired the priests, every one over against his house.”

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 (Nehemiah 3:30). 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.

Nehemiah 4:14

“And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.”

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.”

Nehemiah 5:15

“But the former governors that had been before me were chargeable unto the people, and had taken of them bread and wine, beside forty shekels of silver; yea, even their servants bare rule over the people: but so did not I, because of the fear of God.”

THESSE 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 Corinthians 9. 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 Mahomet 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.”

Nehemiah 6:3

“And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?”

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.” (Colossians 3:3)

Nehemiah 7:64

“These sought their register among those that were reckoned by genealogy, but it was not found: therefore were they, as polluted, put from the priesthood.”

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 that 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 in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.” (Hebrews 2:17) He waits to reinstate the erring soul, restore it to the priestly office, and give it priestly food and maintenance.

Nehemiah 8:10

“Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.”

“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 and 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.

Nehemiah 9:2

“And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.”

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.” (Acts 13:2)

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.” (Leviticus 20:24,26). 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, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing: and I will receive you.” (2 Corinthians 6:17) 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!”

Nehemiah 10:39

“For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the offering of the corn, of the new wine, and the oil, unto the chambers, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests that minister, and the porters, and the singers: and we will not forsake the house of our God.”

IT was about this time that Malachi wrote the memorable words, “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house; and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.” (Malachi 3:10) 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 scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.” (Proverbs 11:24)

Nehemiah 11:23

“For it was the king’s commandment concerning them, that a certain portion should be for the singers, due for every day.”

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.

Nehemiah 12: 24, 36, 37, 45, 46

“And the chief of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brethren over against them, to praise and to give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, ward over against ward. ... And his brethren, Shemaiah, and Azarael, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethaneel, and Judah, Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God, and Ezra the scribe before them. And at the fountain gate, which was over against them, they went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the going up of the wall, above the house of David, even unto the water gate eastward. ... And both the singers and the porters kept the ward of their God, and the ward of the purification, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son. For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving unto God.”

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, which shall fulfil all my will” (Acts 13:22). 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 fullness 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.

Nehemiah 13:14, 22, 31

“Remember me, O my God, concerning this, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the offices thereof. ... And I commanded the Levites that they should cleanse themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the sabbath day. Remember me, O my God, concerning this also, and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy. ... And for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the firstfruits. Remember me, O my God, for good.”

THRIE 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 Tobiah’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.

Esther 1:22

“For he sent letters into all the king’s provinces, into every province according to the writing thereof, and to every people after their language, that every man should bear rule in his own house, and that it should be published according to the language of every people.”

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 Timothy 3:4,5).

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 Timothy 3:2,3).

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— “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” (Matthew 7:12)

Esther 2:7

“And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle’s daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter.”

THROUGH this one girl’s 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 does 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.

Esther 3:2

“And all the king’s servants, that were in the king’s gate, bowed, and revered Haman: for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence.”

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 enables 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.” (Isaiah 41:10) 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, “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God.” (Revelation 3:12) 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!”

Esther 4:14

“For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?”

WHAT 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.

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.

Esther 5:2

“And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre.”

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, “... and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish.” (Esther 4:16) 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.

Esther 6:10

“Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king’s gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken.”

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 he hath set the world upon them.” (1 Samuel 2:8) 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.” (Revelation 3:8,9)

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.”

Esther 7:2

“And the king said again unto Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is thy petition, queen Esther? and it shall be granted thee: and what is thy request? and it shall be performed, even to the half of the kingdom.”

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.” (Ephesians 3:20) 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.” (John 15:7)

“Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.” (John 16:23)

Esther 8:8

“Write ye also for the Jews, as it liketh you, in the king’s name, and seal it with the king’s ring: for the writing which is written in the king’s name, and sealed with the king’s ring, may no man reverse.”

IN Esther 3:10 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 ring may no man 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 1:3 (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. (John 6:27) “... grieve not the holy spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption,” says the Apostle. (Ephesians 4:30)

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.

Esther 9:1

“Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the same, when the king’s commandment and his decree drew near to be put in execution, in the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have power over them, (though it was turned to the contrary, that the Jews had rule over them that hated them;)”

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 will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and 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.” (Revelation 3:9) 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 in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ... and lo, I am with you alway.” (Matthew 28:18-20) 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.”

Esther 10:3

“For Mordecai the Jew was next unto king Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews, and accepted of the multitude of his brethren, seeking the wealth of his people, and speaking peace to all his seed.”

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 lips. 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 do 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 1:5

“And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually.”

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.

Job 2:3

“And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.”

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 by myself.” (1 Corinthians 4:4) 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, ... wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 40:4; 42:6)

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 3:1

“After this opened Job his mouth, and cursed his day.”

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!”

Job 4:5

“But now it is come upon thee, and thou faintest; it toucheth thee, and thou art troubled.”

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 uprightness of thy ways,” (Job 4:6) 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.”

Job 5:18

“For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole.”

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.” (Hebrews 12:5,6)

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.

Job 6:15

“My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away;”

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 were confounded because they had hoped; they came thither, and were ashamed.” (Job 6:20)

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.” (Hebrews 13:5) Nothing gives Him greater joy than to be the perfect circle of which earth’s friendships are broken arcs.

Job 7:17-18

“What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him? And that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?”

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.

Job 8:6

“If thou wert pure and upright; surely now he would awake for thee, and make the habitation of thy righteousness prosperous.”

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 today 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.

Job 9:31

“Yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me.”

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.”

Job 10:21

“Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death;”

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.” (Romans 13:12)

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.” (Hebrews 10:37) 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.”

Job 11:7

“Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?”

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 not knoweth not God; for God is Love.” (1 John 4:8) 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, O mystery of strength and beauty?” “Shiloh, Rest Giver,” is the deep response.

Job 12:11

“Doth not the ear try words? and the mouth taste his meat?”

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. Hearken, 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 when He calls you.

Job 13:15

“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.”

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 ever deepening 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.”

Job 14:14

“If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.”

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 Timothy 2:4). 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.

Job 15:4

“Yea, thou castest off fear, and restrainest prayer before God.”

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 encourage 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!

Job 16:12

“I was at ease, but he hath broken me asunder: he hath also taken me by my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set me up for his mark.”

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.”

Job 17:9

“The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.”

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 God-given 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.

Job 18:14

“His confidence shall be rooted out of his tabernacle, and it shall bring him to the king of terrors.”

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 dwelling place 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. (John 11:26) 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.

“O death, where is thy sting! O grave, where is thy victory! ... But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:55, 57)

Job 19:25

“For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:”

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.”

Job 20:29

“This is the portion of a wicked man from God, and the heritage appointed unto him by God.”

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.” (Psalm 37:35, 36)

Job 21:22

“Shall any teach God knowledge? seeing he judgeth those that are high.”

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 downittings 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, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.” (Psalm 139:3, 4) 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.

Job 22:23

“If thou return to the Almighty, thou shalt be built up, thou shalt put away iniquity far from thy tabernacles.”

THESSE 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. O 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.”

Job 23:3

“Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!”

POOOR 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 vail 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.”*

Job 24:24

“They are exalted for a little while, but are gone and brought low; they are taken out of the way as all other, and cut off as the tops of the ears of corn.”

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 brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.” (Psalm 73:19, 20)

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.

Job 25:4

“How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman?”

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.” (Romans 8:30) 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 3:16 might be rendered, *Whosoever even believeth into Him*. The motion of faith is ever towards the heart of Him who died, rose and lives. Then through our faith the Spirit produces a holy character.

Job 26:14

“Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand? ”

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.

Job 27:6

“My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.”

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.

Job 28:14

“The depth saith, It is not in me: and the sea saith, It is not with me.”

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, 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.

Job 29:2

“Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me;”

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.

Job 30:20

“I cry unto thee, and thou dost not hear me: I stand up, and thou regardest me not.”

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.

Job 31:6

“Let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know mine integrity.”

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.

Job 31:1. Purity in the look.

Job 31:7. Cleanliness of the hands.

Job 31:13. Thoughtfulness for domestic servants and underlings.

Job 31:16. Justice to the poor and the widow.

Job 31:17. Willingness to share morsels, and to be a father to the fatherless.

Job 31:19, 20. Clothing for the naked.

Job 31:21. The refusal to depute to others help which one might render.

Job 31:24. The heart weaned from the love of gold.

Job 31:26. Refusal to turn aside from idols.

Job 31:29. Inability to rejoice at the destruction of those who had derided and hated.

Job 31:33. 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.

Job 32:8

“But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.”

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.

Job 33:23

“If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness:”

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.

Job 34:29

“When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only:”

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, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee.” (Zechariah 3:2) 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.”

Job 35:10

“But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night;”

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.”

INFORMATION ON THE SCRIPTURE TEXTS USED IN THIS DEVOTIONAL

2 CHRONICLES: King Solomon and His Successors

Writer: Probably Ezra

Key Passage: “And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.” 2 Chronicles 15:2

Remarks: It contains the written record of Israel from Solomon till the Decree of Cyrus for the Return of the Jews to the land of Israel.

Outline:

1. The Glowing Successes of Solomon’s Reign (1-9)
2. The Growing Failures of His Successors’ Reigns (10-36)

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EZRA: Restoration and Reform

Writer: Ezra

Key Passage: “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.” Ezra 7:10

Remarks: It teaches us how God can work in seemingly impossible circumstances. Nothing less than divine power could have taken a captive people and brought them back into their land to reestablish their nation.

Outline:

1. Restoration under Zerubbabel (1-6)
2. Reforms under Ezra (7-10)

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NEHEMIAH: Rise up and Build!

Writer: Nehemiah

Key Passage: “Then answered I them, and said unto them, The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build: but ye have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.”
Nehemiah 2:20

Remarks: It shows how the broken down walls of Jerusalem and the failing faith of the Jews were restored despite great opposition, through the godly leadership of Nehemiah and a host of Jewish brethren who responded to the divine challenge to rise and build.

Outline:

1. The Plans for Building (1-2)
2. The Work of Building (3-6)
3. The Thanksgiving for the Building (7-13)

* * *

ESTHER: God’s Providence in Action

Writer: Unknown

Key Passage: “For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father’s house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” Esther 4:14

Remarks: It relates how Esther, a Jewish maiden, became the Queen of Xerxes the Persian King, and became the means by which her people were rescued from the destruction planned for them by the King's prime minister.

Outline:

1. The Danger to God's People (1-3)
2. The Decision of God's Servant (4-5)
3. The Deliverance of God's People (6-10)

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JOB: Trusting God in Suffering

Writer: Probably Moses

Key Passage: "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God:" Job 19:25,26

Remarks: It records the physical and spiritual experiences of Job, an ancient Patriarch, whose faith was severely tested.

Outline:

1. The Sufferings of Job (1-3)
2. The Opinions of Job's Friends (4-37)
3. The Answer of God (38-42)

Scripture Memory Programme 2009

The Fruit-Bearing Christian

October 4 & 11 – Faith in God

Hebrews 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

October 18 & 25 – Guidance from God

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

November 1 & 8 – Wisdom from God

James 1:5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

November 15 & 22 – Help for Prayer

Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

November 29 – Gospel

John 5:24 Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.

December 6 & 13 – Hindrance to Prayer

Psalms 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

December 20 & 27 – Christ's Birth

Galatians 4:4-5 But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.