

Our Daily Homily

By
F.B. Meyer
VOLUME Eleven
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 August not be a spacious and well-stocked library, it August 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 August 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.

Proverbs 25:21–22

“If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee.”

THE pagan ideal of a manly life was to succeed in doing as much good to your friends, and as much injury to your enemies, as possible. A few exceptions to this rule are recorded; but the wonder at them proves that the sentiments of forgiveness and mercy were foreign to popular morality and public opinion. How different is the teaching of the Bible! And in this have we not an evidence of its Divine authority? Our Lord went further even than this noble maxim; He said, “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;” Matthew 5:44

We are not taught to be entirely indifferent to the moral qualities of actions. The perception of sin and evil is necessary to a holy soul. And it is not required that we should abjure that holy resentment to wrong-doing, to which the apostle alludes when he says, “Be ye angry, and sin not.” (Ephesian 4;26) We must always resent wrong as wrong, though we must carefully eliminate any vindictive feeling towards the wrong-doer.

Do you think that others have wronged you? Pity them; pray for them; seek them out; show them their fault, humbly and meekly; wash their feet; take the mote out of their eye; seek to restore them in a spirit of meekness, remembering that you may be tempted; heap coals of loving-kindness on their heads; bring them if possible into such a broken and tender frame of mind, that they may seek forgiveness at your hand and God’s. If you cannot act thus with all the emotion you would feel, do it because it is right, and the emotion will inevitably follow. It was said of Archbishop Leighton, that to do him an injury was to secure his lasting friendship.

Proverbs 26:20

“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.”

HOW simple a parable! Of course it must be so. As soon as a fire has reached the end of the material on which it fed, it expires.

This is true of the fire of slander. As long as there is an ear to receive, and a tongue to pass on, some piece of malicious slander will continue to circulate. But directly it reaches a hearer who will not whisper it forward, in that direction at least its progress is arrested. Why do you not adopt this role, and urge others to do so? Hear if you must the whisper of the slanderer; but let it stop with you, locked in the secret of your own breast. You may be voted rather uninteresting and stupid by a certain society which thrives in whispered calumnies; but you will save many a heart from being torn and lacerated by unkindness and falsehood.

How graphic that word “whisperer” is! People always tell you to be sure not to tell; it is a way they have, though they do not expect you for a moment to keep the story to yourself. It is the kiss under which they betray. Always tell them that you refuse to be an accomplice in evil. If there is a wrong concerning which you must neither take action nor speak, you had better not defile your ears with it.

This is true of the fire of the Holy Ghost. You must feed it by your loving obedience, your study of the Word of God, your faith and prayer. Yield yourself more entirely to His possession. Let your spirit, soul, and body, your every act and desire, be as fuel to the Spirit of God. Pile up the wood of continual sacrifice and self-surrender, till the Divine fire reaches out its hands toward heaven. Even though the wood, like Elijah’s, be drenched with water, God’s fire will conquer!

Proverbs 27:7

“The full soul loatheth an honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.”

HONEY was not used in sacrifices made by fire unto the Lord. Its luscious taste may have made it an emblem of the pleasures of the world. As bees roam from flower to flower, sipping nectar here and there, so does the heart of the worldling roam over the world for satisfaction; settling nowhere for long, but extracting sweets from a variety of attractive sources.

The best way of combating worldliness is by satisfying the heart with something better. The full soul loatheth even the honeycomb. When the prodigal gets the fatted calf, he has no further hankering after the husks which the swine eat. The girl who gets real jewels throws away her shams; and the child who has become a man has no taste for childish toys that once seemed all-important. This is the meaning of the old proverb: Love God, and do as you like. Whenever the spirit of worldliness gets into a congregation, you may be sure that the teaching has been defective, and that souls have not been made to sit at the rich banquet of the Divine providing.

We are reminded of the words which the psalmist applied to the Word of God: “Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.” (Psalm 19:10) Fill your heart with God and His sacred truth, and the things of the world will lose their charm. Do you know this absorbing love of Jesus? We can at least choose to know it, and present ourselves to the Holy Spirit, that He may shed it abroad in our hearts. Oh to be full! Full of the more abundant life of which the Lord spoke, of the unspeakable joy, of the peace that passeth understanding — in a word, of Jesus, as the chief and best.

Proverbs 28:13

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”

THERE must be confession before forgiveness. This is clearly taught everywhere in God’s Word. “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.” (Luke 17:3,4) But he must turn and say, *I repent*. This is the clear condition. You may and must use every method of inducing him to say this; but he must be brought to say it, before it is right to pronounce the gracious formula of absolution. There may be the disposition to forgive, but there cannot be the declaration of forgiveness, until the wrongdoer perceives the wrong and expresses his regret and sorrow.

The prodigal must say to his father, “I have sinned.” It is only as we confess our sins, that our merciful High Priest can forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Confession is to take God’s side against sin. It is the lifting out of one thing after another from heart and life, and holding them for a moment before God, with the acknowledgment that it is our fault, our grievous fault.

There is only one way in which transgressions can be covered: that of which the psalmist speaks, when he says, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is *covered*.” (Psalm 32:1), because hidden under the propitiation of the blood. In Hood’s poem, Eugene Aram sought to cover his sin under the leaves of the forest, and beneath the waters of the river. But in vain. So sinners try to cover their sins in vain. But God hath set forth Christ Jesus to be a propitiation — a word which denotes the mercy-seat — the lid that covered the stone slabs on which the finger of God had written the Law.

Proverbs 29:18

“Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.”

WHAT a difference it makes to our teaching and preaching where there is no vision! The people perish for want of seers of those who can say with the apostle, “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us.” (1 John 1:3) It is not difficult to know whether a poet or painter has a vision. If he has, there is glow and passion in his work. And it is not more difficult to detect in the accent of the speaker on divine things, whether he is speaking at secondhand, or as the result of direct vision.

This vision of God was vouchsafed to Moses and Elijah and the apostle Paul. Concerning the latter God said, he shall be “a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;” (Acts 26:16) This is our only qualification for teaching others; not intellect, nor imagination, nor rhetoric, but to have seen the King and beheld the pattern on the mount. For such a vision, on our part, there must be humility, patience, and faith, a definite withdrawal from the life of sense, and a definite fixedness of gaze on the things that are unseen and eternal. But on God’s part there must be revelation. “It pleased God, ... ” said the apostle, “ ... to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach Him. ... ” (Galatians 1:15, 16)

The apostle said, “I could not see for the glory of that light.” (Acts 22:11) A party of tourists was divided one dull morning in Switzerland; the majority thought that it was useless to attempt the mountains. A few started, soon got beyond the low-hanging clouds, spent a day in the heights under marvellous skies, and returned at night, radiant, and overflowing with what they had seen. Ah, speaking is easy when one has *seen!*

Proverbs 30:8

“Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me:”

GOD knows what you need for the maintenance of physical life and strength. The body is more than meat, and to have given you this is a pledge that He will give you that. The body is the vehicle and organ of the soul; and since God has given such a wonderful instrument into your custody, He is bound as need arises to furnish needful supplies. He could not expect that you should do what He has arranged should be done in your life, without providing for the repair and maintenance of the wonderful machine through which alone your life-plan can be realized. Trust in His faithfulness. He cannot deny Himself.

But there is other food which is needful. The daily bread of love, of hope, of holy thought and fellowship. There is other hunger than that of the body. But this also will be provided, according as each day requires. If the human fails, the Divine will take its place, and God Himself will become the complement of your need. The Chinese Christians often put on the gravestones of their cemeteries the words, “They shall hunger no more,” in allusion to the idea of the Confucians that children must constantly be sending on supplies to maintain their ancestors. And may we not say, with unwavering certainty, of those who have learnt to be satisfied with God, “They shall hunger no more”? (Revelation 7:16)

In God’s granaries there is our share of corn already calculated for and provided. Let us ask for and claim it. We have no wish to have more than our share, or to despoil others. As Jesus said, Give us each day the day’s supply. O happy child of the great Father, His hired servants have enough and to spare; there is plenty for thee!

Proverbs 31:11

“The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.”

THIS alphabetical poem to godly womanhood is one of the gems of Old Testament Scriptures. Clearly the Hebrew woman was held in high honour, and had as much freedom of action as she enjoys in Christian countries. Herein the contrast was very marked, as against the women of other Oriental nations. But in the whole delineation there is hardly any trait more beautiful than this — absolute trustworthiness. You can see the pair together: the husband comes in from sitting among the elders, his heart weighted with affairs of state, and he seeks her confidence and advice. He has no fear of her betraying his secrets. He can safely trust her.

This surely is the most sacred joy a woman can have. To be consulted, to be trusted, to share the common toils and responsibilities. Who would not work willingly with her hands, and rise while yet night, and engage in ceaseless toils, if only she had the inspiration that trust brings!

“If then your future life should need
A strength my love can only gain
Through suffering — or my heart be freed
Only by sorrow from some stain,
Then you shall give, and I will take
This Crown of fire for Love’s dear sake.”

Can Christ, in like manner, safely trust us? Can He trust us with His secrets, His interests, His money? Abraham was one whom God could safely trust, and He did trust him as His friend: “Shall I hide from Abraham ... for I have known him?”(Genesis 18:17-19) It is required of us also that we be absolutely trustworthy.

Ecclesiastes 1:7

“All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.”

THE complaint of this chapter is the tiresome monotony of existence. Always the same tedious routine! The jaded soul of the worldling, who has put God out of his life, sees nothing fresh or interesting anywhere, and yawns with weariness. King Solomon had everything that the world could give to make his years rich, glad, and useful. But his heart turned away from God to things, from the only true God to idols, from the spiritual to the sensual, from heaven to earth; and he became a jaded voluptuary, who records his experiences on these pages, to warn coming generations. His words remind us of Byron's lament at his life being in the sere and yellow leaf; of the closing sentence of "Vanity Fair"; and of entries in the journals of the world's greatest wits and courtiers.

All the rivers of earthly joy may be flowing into your heart, but they will never fill it. They may recede, or dry up, or ebb; but if not, still they will never satisfy. The pleasures of this world after a while become monotonous, and pall on our taste. The appetite grows with its food. But in Christ there is perennial interest. The water that He gives rises up to eternal life. In His love and service there is always satisfaction and blessedness. We need not go outside of Him for new delights; and to know Him is to possess a secret which makes all things new.

I know of a gentleman, who has everything that wealth can give, but who is kept in a perpetual state of irritation, because he cannot eradicate the daisies from his lawn. There is a freckle on every flower, a stain on every leaf, a drawback in every lot, that we may be driven to find perfect fruition in God only.

Ecclesiastes 2:23

“For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity.”

WHAT a glimpse this is into a heart that has put God out! Solomon’s power turned away his heart, so that he was not perfect with God, as David, his father. He drifted from God; and plunged into pleasure and laughter; into building and planting; into the pursuit of science and learning. “Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them. ... And, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, ...” (Ecclesiastes 2:9-11). Nothing can satisfy us but God. We were made for Him; and the heart, as Augustine says, must be for ever restless till it finds rest in Him. Thus the shell, brought home from the sea-shore and placed on the shelf, sighs each time you place it to your ear for the ocean whence it came.

We have no need to envy those who prosper in this world, but are without God, and without hope. Their days are sorrows, and their travail is grief, and at night their hearts take no rest. But if we are to avoid their inward anguish, we must avoid their fatal mistake, and learn to take God into our lives. The river of life, which is the Holy Spirit, flows at our feet; but we must stoop to take it freely.

Dr. Gordon records the story of a traveller in Barbary, who saw a beautiful clear spring of water, over which was inscribed the legend; “*Drink, and be gone.*” Robbers infested the region, and were constantly on the track of the traveller, ready to waylay and rob him. Therefore he must snatch the cooling draught and hasten on. Shall we refuse ourselves all pleasure in this world? Shall we write *Touch not* on every innocent gratification? No; but as soon as we have tasted of the pleasant draught, and lingered long enough to refresh our jaded souls, to hasten to life’s serious tasks.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

“He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.”

THE Preacher has been enumerating the various extremes and alternatives of existence, and the natural conclusion might seem to be that since each neutralizes the other, it might be as well for a man to do nothing at all. But a deeper thought is suggested. Man is greater than the changes around him; he has eternity in his heart, and therefore all the varied circumstances of human life resemble the wheels of some great machine, the cogs of which turn in different directions, but the effect is a forward motion, and the manufacture of a fabric that will outlive the machinery that made it. We are greater than circumstance, or change, or things. We have the capacity for the Eternal and Infinite. As the sea-shell sighs for the ocean, so our hearts cry out, though sometimes inarticulately, for God, for the living God. Christ said that foxes have holes and the birds their nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head; and this is true in another sense. The noblest men are those least able to rest anywhere short of God.

God made man in His own image; and nothing more surely attests the greatness of our origin than those faculties of the soul which are capable of yearning for, conceiving, and enjoying the Infinite, the Immortal, and the Divine. And every appetite in nature and grace has its appropriate satisfaction.

Let us come to Him who has the words of eternal life, who is Himself the Bread that endureth unto eternal life. He that cometh to Him shall never hunger; he that believeth in Him shall never thirst.

“Here would we end our quest;
Alone are found in Thee
The life of perfect bliss — the rest
Of immortality.”

Ecclesiastes 4:1

“So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.”

“DO ye hear the children weeping, O my brothers,
Ere the morrow comes with years?
They are leaning their young heads against their mothers,
But that cannot stop their tears.
The young lambs are bleating in the meadows;
The young birds are chirping in the nest;
The young fawns are playing with the shadows;
The young flowers are blowing toward the west—
But the young, young children, O my brothers,
They are weeping bitterly!
They are weeping in the playtime of the others,
In the country of the free.”

It is a sad, sad world, and perhaps must get sadder yet. It may be that we have not yet reached the darkest hour. Oh the tears of the oppressed; the tiny children; the terror-stricken fugitives from the Turk, the European trader, and the drunken tyrant of the home! Through all the centuries tears have flowed, enough to float a navy.

There need be no difficulty in accounting for them. Our race has elected the service of sin and self. Turning our back on God, for whom we were made, we have turned every one to our own way, and are inheriting the ancient curse of travail, tears, thorns, and death. It is quite true that many suffer innocently and vicariously, because we are members one of another; and by the mysterious arrangement of the Almighty the whole race is bound together by mysterious but indissoluble cords. In Adam all die, all suffer, all sorrow and weep, just as in Christ shall all be made alive. The pain must last, till the Stronger than the strong comes to divide the spoils, and met the captives free.

How comforting it is to realize that God knows our sorrows, puts our tears into His bottle, is afflicted in all our affliction. and bears us on His heart.

Ecclesiastes 5:1

“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.”

THIS is certainly half of our business, when we kneel to pray. It is a drawing nigh to hear. One has truly said that the closet is not so much an oratory, in the narrow sense of making requests, as an *observatory*, from which we get new views of God, and new revelations of Him.

We are all inclined to be rash with our mouth. We rush into the presence of God, leave our card as on a morning call, and then plunge into the eager rush of our life. We have spoken to Him, but not stayed to hear what He would say in reply. We have suggested many things to Him, but have not sought for His comments, or suggestions, in return. We do not take time to fix the heart's gaze on the unseen and eternal, or to abstract our mind from the voices of the world, so as to hear the still small voice that speaks in silence and solitude.

“Only the waters which in perfect stillness lie

Give back an undistorted image of the sky.”

Keep thy foot; take off the shoes from thy feet, when entering the Presence-chamber, whether alone or with others. Walk warily and reverently; behold He is near, before whom angels veil their faces with their wings. Come into His presence with holy fear. Let there be no irreverence in demeanor. One writes of the late Mr. Gladstone, “The House of God seemed to be to him at all times just what its name implied; and it is impossible to think of him at any service missing a response, or forgetting an ‘Amen.’ Devotion, earnestness, and concentrated attention were the regular attributes of his nature when engaged in worship. He realized in the simplest fashion that worship was communing with God.”

Ecclesiastes 6:1

“There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men:”

THE Preacher constantly refers to what is done under the sun; and is not this the clue to so much that is puzzling in this book? If your horizon is limited to what the sun shines on, it is impossible to get the true standpoint of vision, or discover the real policy of life. If this world and the time-day are all, we are entangled in an inexplicable maze. It is impossible to believe in the existence of a benign and wise Creator unless there is more than we can see, larger than we can grasp. We have no choice but blank materialism, unless we believe there is someone and something over and above the sun, and that the sun and his attendant train of worlds is but a speck in the vastness of His existence.

O Christian soul, let you and me get beyond the sun, which one day will be no more, to the Lord, who is an everlasting light. Let us sit with Him in the heavenlies, and thence look down upon man and his little life. What inconsiderable atoms do kings and empires appear; even our affliction seems to be but light, and for a moment! Not on this side of the sun, but on that lies our true portion and home, our enduring substance.

In order to live as we should, the sun must be under our feet, a position which is only possible to those who are in Christ Jesus. “I knew a man in Christ,” says the Apostle, “... caught up to the third heaven, ... and heard unspeakable words.” (2 Corinthians 12:2-4) Would you be unworldly, seek to become other worldly? Do you want the sun to grow dim? — ask for the light which is above the brightness of the sun.

Set your affections on those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God.

Ecclesiastes 7:3

“Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.”

WHO does not know that our most sorrowful days have been amongst our best? When the face is wreathed with smiles, and we trip lightly over meadows bespangled with spring flowers, our heart is often running to waste. The soul which is always blithe and gay misses the deepest life. It has its reward, and it is satisfied to its measure, though that measure is a very scanty one. But the heart is dwarfed, and the nature, which is capable of the highest heights, the deepest depths, is undeveloped; and life presently burns down to its socket without having known the resonance of the deepest chords of joy. “Blessed are they that mourn.” (Matthew 5:4)

Stars shine brightest in the long dark nights of winter. The gentians show their fairest bloom amidst almost inaccessible heights of snow and ice. God’s promises seem to wait for the pressure of pain to trample out their richest juice as in a wine-press. Sorrow brings us nearest to the Man of Sorrows, and is the surest passport to His loving sympathy. Only those who have sorrowed know how tender His comfort can be. It is only as the door shuts upon the joys of the earth that the window is opened to the blessedness of the unseen and eternal. Let sadness cover your face, Jesus will enter the heart, and make it glad, for the days in which you have been afflicted, and the years in which you have seen evil.

Is your face sad? Are you passing through bitter and trying experiences? Be of good cheer. Out of the sorrows that make the face sad will come ultimate joy. This affliction is working out afar more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. And the day is not distant when God will wipe tears from off all faces.

Ecclesiastes 8:4

“Where the word of a king is, there is power: and who may say unto him, What doest thou?”

WHEN our King speaks, it is done. He spoke in creation, and power went with His word to call all things out of nothing. He spoke in His earthly ministry, and power accompanied every word, in giving eyes to the blind and life to the dead. He spoke, and the paralyzed had power to walk. He spoke, and the winds dropped, whilst the tumultuous waves were hushed to rest. He spoke, and men knew their sins were forgiven, to be remembered against them no more for ever. He spoke, and the dying thief passed into Paradise.

Whatever He bids you do by His word, be sure that He will enable you to do it by His power. He works in us to will and to work of His good pleasure; that is, He never directs us in any path of obedience or service without furnishing a sufficient supply of grace. Does He bid you renounce some evil habit? The power to renounce it awaits you. Claim it. Does He bid you walk on the water! The power by which to walk only waits for you to claim it. Does He bid you perform irksome duty? There is such transforming power issuing from Him as to make duty a delight, if only you will avail yourself of it. Whenever you are called to stand up to speak the word of your King, be sure to seek and obtain the power — *that* shall prove your best credential. Take the power of the King with you: it is His signet-ring, by which men will be convinced that you have been entrusted with His word.

“Sustain me, that with Thee I walk these waves
Resisting! — Breathe me upward, Thou in me
Aspiring, Who art the Way, the Truth, the Life—
That no Truth henceforth seem indifferent,
No Way to Truth laborious, and no Life,
Not even this life I live, intolerable!”

Ecclesiastes 9:11

“I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.”

THIS is true in another sense than the Preacher meant. His conclusion was that time and chance happen to all alike in the race and battle of life. God comes to those who are not swift, but, like Mephibosheth, lame on both feet, and gives them the prize which they could not win; that He bends over those who are not strong, and gives them the victory which they could not procure. The Gospel is full of promise to younger sons, bruised reeds, lame and helpless souls, to babes and sucklings, to those that have no might; whilst it hides its secrets from the wise and prudent, and withholds its rewards from the swift and strong.

You are not swift. Long ago the spring was taken from your life, and the elasticity from your feet. For many years you have lain by the Beautiful Gate, seeing the happy souls pass to the inner shrine, and coming out entranced. You have been content to live on their alms. But better things are in store. He who knows your case will even now give you perfect soundness Though you cannot win the prize of your high calling by running, it shall be yours by receiving and taking. It is a gift; and though you have not legs you have surely hands.

You are not strong. But it is well. Many of us are too strong for God. He has to weaken us by touching the sinew of our thigh. When Jacob went from fighting to clinging, he became a prince with God. Isaiah left it on record that God gives power to the faint, and increases might to those who have no power. And the great Apostle of the Gentiles gloried in his infirmities, because he had discovered that when he was weak then he was strong, since the power of Christ was only perfected in weakness.

Ecclesiastes 10:10

“If the iron be blunt, and he do not whet the edge, then must he put to more strength: but wisdom is profitable to direct.”

IF this is true, as we know it is, may we not often use it as an appeal to God? There are times with all who work for God, when they are blunt, through much usage. The brain is blunt, and cannot think. The heart is blunt, and cannot feel. The voice is blunt, and has lost its ringing note. How often the evangelist, towards the end of a series of services, feels blunt! Sometimes also there are private sorrows, of which we cannot speak, which take off the edge. At all such times let us turn to God and say, “Put in more strength. Let thy power be magnified in my weakness. Give more grace, so that thy work shall not suffer.” I suppose Paul meant this when he said that he gloried in infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. Surely more work is done by a blunt edge and Divine power, than by a sharp edge and little power.

This, however, does not justify us in seeking to be blunt. And when we are conscious that the edge is going off, it becomes us to seek a fresh whetting. The time is not lost in the harvest-field when the reapers whet their scythes with musical tinkle. A day in the country or a week by the seaside are very pleasant whetstones. Solomon says that friendship, the face of a friend, will sharpen a blunt edge; and full often we have been sharpened and quickened by seasons of holy fellowship. But after all, nothing gives us such a keen edge as the devotional perusal of the Divine Word. Let us appropriate the words of the prophet, and each one ask to be made a new *sharp* threshing-instrument having teeth, that we may thresh the mountains, and make them small, and give our God as little anxiety as possible.

Ecclesiastes 11:6

“In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.”

WE are all tempted to look too much to the winds and clouds. We study the faces of people, their moods and circumstances, and say, “It is not a favorable time to approach them about their souls. He does not look to be a likely case, or in a likely mood.” But how do we know? If we are always waiting for favoring conditions, we shall resemble the farmer who is ever looking out for perfect weather, and lets the whole autumn pass without one handful of grain reaching the furrows; or who is always studying the clouds, seeking for a spell of hot summer weather; and presently the chance is gone, and the crop lost.

In fact, we can never tell what God is doing in the secrets of the heart. He may have been prosecuting His deep and wise designs with the souls that appear most untoward and unprepossessing. He may have led them to such a point that they are most eagerly yearning for the hand to lead them into the light. The eunuch in his chariot, might not, from a distance, have seemed specially ripe for the Christian evangelist; but, on coming near, he was discovered to be an enquirer. Saul of Tarsus was the least likely man in all Palestine to be a Christian; but God had been at work with him. Let us dare then to trust God, not looking for winds or sunshine, but scattering everywhere the precious seed of the Gospel.

“Say not, the struggle naught availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain;
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been things remain.

“For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.”

Ecclesiastes 12:10

“The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth.”

THE wise preacher or teacher is not content with merely teaching the people knowledge, he will ponder and seek out and set in order the lessons of Divine wisdom; and when these are settled, he will go on to find out acceptable words. We must be careful to secure the “apples of gold,” and no less careful to place them in the “pictures of silver.” Not that we are to make beauty of language an object in itself; but having conceived high and holy thoughts we should give them a worthy expression, so that the Royal word may ride forth in a becoming equipage. It is unfit that the vessels of the sanctuary should be carried only in badger skins; their first covering at least must be “all of blue.” If we are stewards in God’s household to give His children food, let us serve it up suitably. The linen should be clean, and the table garnished.

Remember, however, that the words of the wise are as goads and nails. They must have points, sometimes to prick to duty, at other times to stick fast in the memory. In every sermon or lesson there should be *points*. To arrest and compel attention is more important than to please the ear. Do not refine and beautify it to such an extent that there may be nothing left to stir the conscience and lacerate the heart.

Words that best fit the enunciation of God’s truth are given from the One Shepherd. We are enriched by Him, not only in all knowledge but in all utterance. He who made the mouth can put His words into the mouth. Ask Him to speak to you, that you may speak in accents borrowed from His tone; for it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you.

Song of Solomon 1:4

“Draw me, we will run after thee: the king hath brought me into his chambers: we will be glad and rejoice in thee, we will remember thy love more than wine: the upright love thee.”

WE cannot force an entrance into the inner chambers of the love of God. They remind one of the apartments which are reserved for the personal use of the sovereign, and are private from the foot of strangers. All the world is welcome to the State apartments; but only the favoured few to the inner sanctuary. So it is with the love of God. It is open to all the world; but its secret is hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed to babes.

It is pleasant to think of the chambers of the King opening one from the other in a long and glorious succession, and to imagine each inscribed with its text and adorned with characteristic emblems. The Chamber of Regeneration leading to Assurance; and this to Consecration; and this to the Enduement of the Holy Spirit; and this to the Quiet Heart; and this to a Life of Victory; and this to Abiding Fellowship. Each is a distinct phase of the Christian life; and from one to another the King leads the obedient and loving disciple. At each advance the chambers become more magnificent and delightful, until the last one opens out upon a terrace which looks across the brief space to the City of God.

Will you let the King do this? Then you must begin by enthroning Him in your heart and obeying Him in your life. You must keep his words, that He may manifest Himself unto you, as He does not unto the world. Then indeed we shall be glad, and rejoice, and make mention of his love. What if the beauty of our surroundings makes us cry out that we are black as the tents of Kedar! He knew it all before, and will not love us less; nay, He will array us in His own comeliness.

Song of Solomon 2:8

“The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills.”

THERE are times when winter rules within, and the atmosphere is full of rain, and the birds are mute. It does not necessarily argue that we have back-slidden; only that the rich, emotional life has for a little died down, as the sap sinks to the earth during the winter's pause.

The first symptom of returning joy is the voice of the Beloved Master. We do not seek Him, but He us. We do not call, but He calls. The voice of spring is heard sounding through our soul. The sweet, clear, tender notes of the Savior ring melodiously around us, and as we hear them we know that our winter is past, the rain is over and gone, and the flowers and birds are at hand.

Rise up, my love! Rise up from lethargy and sloth; from the low levels on which you have lived; from the earth with its attractions, and the grave with its fetters. And as the command issues from His lips, He gives rising grace. Come away, He cries. There is richer life and wider upon the mountains. Let us climb the heights that beckon us. The voice of Christ is constantly summoning us to fuller experiences, to leave what is behind and below, to press up and on, so that we may know Him and the power of His resurrection.

How appropriate these words are as we may conceive of them being spoken to the expectant Church! After centuries of waiting she shall hear the archangel's trump, and it will be the call of her Beloved to rise up and come away. Then her winter will be past forever; the unwithering flowers will appear; the time of singing will have come; and the voice of the turtle-dove, significant of affection, will be heard throughout Emmanuel's Land.

Song of Solomon 3:1

“By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.”

GOD lets us seek, hiding Himself to draw us after Him. How much our race owes to His hidings! He has hidden pearls in the ocean, jewels in the rocks, coal in the earth, fish in the deep. By all these methods He has drawn men forth from lethargy and inaction, to strenuous and vigorous lives; so that the gains of their toil have consisted not only in the treasures they have obtained, but in the developed faculties which have come to them in the course of their search.

Is it not so in the spiritual life? Our Lord withdraws Himself, not in anger or disappointment, but that we may be sensible of not having attained, of not being already perfect, and that we may follow on to know the Lord, and to apprehend something more of that for which we were apprehended. Do not be disappointed, O Christian soul, if some time you should cease to feel the familiar delight in certain hymns, services, books, or teachers. Thy Master has withdrawn Himself from these; but thou wilt find Him further on. Never rest till you have discovered Him in some deeper revelation. The watchmen that go about the city, and who are probably messengers of Divine truths, may not help you in your quest; but the Holy Spirit waits to lead you into all truth. Open your heart to Him. It is but a little time, and as you pass from all human teachers you will find Him whom you love, or perhaps be found of Him. Then hold Him, or better, be held by Him. It is a sweet motto, *“Teneo et tensor”* — “I hold, and am held.”

“And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light;
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright.”

Song of Solomon 4:16

“Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits.”

THE garden of the heart is like one of those old-fashioned gardens, surrounded by high brick walls, prepared for fruit-trees. I have one in my eye as I write, on the south wall of which old apple-trees have bloomed and fruited for generations. The garden is filled with all manner of spices, “spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, and with all trees of frankincense.” Sometimes, however, the spices hang heavily upon the air. They are present, but hardly discernible to the quickest sense. Then the wind is needed to blow through the garden path, that the spices may flow out and pass beyond the barriers to the passers-by.

How often it has happened in the history of the children of God, that those who have known them have never realized the intrinsic excellence and loveliness of their characters until the north wind of sorrow and pain has broken with blustering force upon them. Then suddenly spices of rarest odour have exhaled and been carried afar. How the delicate trees dread the north wind! What a tremor goes through the crowded garden walks when they hear the husbandman calling to the north wind to awake! We all choose the south wind. But remember that the Euroclydon that swept down the ravines of Crete upon the Alexandrian corn-ship brought out spices which had slumbered unknown in the heart of the great apostle. His courage! His patience! His power of inspiring hope amid despair, and breaking bread with thanksgiving! Ah, north wind, thy ministry has been of incalculable worth to all of us. We shiver before thy searching power, but the spices will repay. A vane in Leicestershire is inscribed with GOD IS LOVE. He is so, from whatever quarter the wind blows.

Song of Solomon 5:9

“What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? what is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so charge us?”

THE daughters of Jerusalem, each of whom had her beloved, could not understand the urgency of this maiden who had lost her beloved. Her anguish at her loss was so extreme, her heart-sickness was so agonizing, her frenzy so bewildering, that they were startled into feeling that he of whom she was bereft was no common lover. There had been times when each of them had been temporarily forlorn; but they knew that they had never suffered like this! The greatness of her pain was the mirror in which they caught a glimpse of the ineffable beauty of the Bridegroom.

Speak of Christ, so that men and women around may be constrained to cry, “Your Beloved excels our beloveds. We cannot speak of them as thou dost of Him. To gain them does not fill us with the same ecstasy, or to lose them with the same woe.”

What are the beloveds that men seek after? There is the beloved of worldly success, of human adulation and applause, of art, science, and war. They intoxicate their admirers, but fail to satisfy. Who can say of them that they are chief, and outshine the gold of Ophir, beryl, sapphires, ivory, and cedar, the rarest products of earth, as synonyms for priceless worth? But all these gathered together are poor and unworthy emblems of the peerless beauty of Emmanuel. White in purity, ruddy with the bloodstain, His bushy locks emblematical of immortal youth, His eyes like water-brooks reflecting the deep azure of the sky and telling of eternal love. Ransack earth for metaphors, and they fall short of the truth. Words fail to express His beauty, His grace, His loveliness: let us try to reflect His glory.

Song of Solomon 6:3

“I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies.”

TO get the full significance of this precious sentence we should compare it with Canticles 2:16. Remark their parallelism, and their contrast.

“My Beloved is mine, and I am his.
He feedeth among the lilies”

And this—

“I am my Beloved’s, and my Beloved is mine.
He feedeth among the lilies”

In the first of these couplets the Spouse lays the first emphasis on her hold of the Beloved; only secondarily does she congratulate herself that she is His. But in the second couplet her chief thought is that she belongs to Him.

In the earlier stages of Christian life, we think most of what we have in Christ; afterwards we love to dwell on His possession of us. You are His estate, for Him to cultivate and rear successive crops for His praise and glory. You are His jewel, to obtain which He renounced all, and on which He will expend infinite care, cutting your facets, and polishing you to shine brightly in His light. You are His house in which He can dwell, opening out unexpected apartments and passages. You are a member of His body, through which He will fulfil His holy purpose. You are His bride, to win whom He came from afar. You are owned, possessed, inhabited, loved, with a peculiar personal affection. As Keble says: “Thou art thy Savior’s darling; doubt no more.”

“As the bridegroom to his chosen,
As the king unto his realm,
As the keep unto the castle,
As the pilot to the helm,
So, Lord, art Thou to me.”

*Song of Solomon 7:10**“I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me.”*

THIS is the thankful recognition of the Bride. She knows that she belongs to, that she is loved by, the Bridegroom — that His desire is turned towards her with ineffable longing.

Dear soul, do you realize the desire of your Beloved towards you? You love Him; but He loves you ever so much more. You desire Him; but His desire towards you is as much greater than yours towards Him, as sunlight is more brilliant than moonlight. Know ye not, says James, that the Spirit which He has caused to dwell in us longeth even to envy? Jesus desires all our love, all our energy, all our possessions, that we should be only, always, all for Him. How have we responded to His great desire? Alas, our response has been very uncertain and unsatisfactory. Sometimes we have felt a pure flame of answering affection; but it has soon been obscured with clouds of smoke, or has died down for want of oil.

The Lord desires more of our time, that we should withdraw ourselves from the busy rush of the world and the absorbing interests of life, in order to allow Him to commune with us. He desires more of our affection, that He may teach us how to respond to His love. He desires to teach us how to share His riches, as His joint-heirs; how to sit with Him in heavenly places; how to work in the energy of His Spirit. Let us yield ourselves to His desires, and allow Him to effect in us and for us all He desires for us, so that we may give Him delight. “As the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee.” (Isaiah 62:5) If, as Zephaniah says, He is silent in his love, because his love is too strong for speech, we may yield ourselves to it without misgiving.

Song of Solomon 8:5

“Who is this that cometh up from the wilderness, leaning upon her beloved? I raised thee up under the apple tree: there thy mother brought thee forth: there she brought thee forth that bare thee.”

STANDING on the mountainous plateau with which Judea passes into the desert, the daughters of Jerusalem behold the Spouse, coming slowly up from the wilderness, leaning hard upon her Beloved; and in this we have an emblem of the Church, and of each faithful soul. The wilderness can well be taken as an emblem of the experience of believers, who are suffered to hunger and thirst, exposed to be smitten by the sun of temptation, and pacing wearily over the lowlands of a somewhat arduous and monotonous existence.

But the wilderness-life is not destined to be our perpetual experience. We are bidden to come up from it. Life is meant to be an unceasing ascent from strength to strength until we stand in Zion before God. Is your path trying and perilous? Does it seem as though you will never gain the heights that rear themselves before your gaze? Do you feel prepared, like Hagar, to yield to despair and death? See, there is One that goes beside. Turn to regard Him. His hands are as though they had been pierced. He is your Beloved; lean on Him. He gives you His arm to rest upon, and He will sustain you when heart and flesh fail. The wilderness will bring out a tenderness, an all-sufficiency, a readiness of resource, on His part, which you would never have guessed unless your exigencies had become imperative. Be sure of this, lean hard, and believe that:

“He will bring thee where the fountains
Fresh and full spring forth above,
Still throughout the endless ages
Serving Him with perfect love.”

Isaiah 1:25

“And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin:”

THE silver had become dross. Jerusalem, the chosen city, was filled with infidelity, formalism, impurity, and deeds of violence. She had been full of judgement, righteousness had lodged in her; but now, murderers. And this was the reason for the blows that had fallen upon her with such unsparing force. The whole land was now desolate; the cities burned with fire; only a small remnant of the people was left. The prophet, his patriot heart wrung with grief, compares her to a sick man in the last stage of disease, the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint; from the sole of the foot, even unto the head, there is no soundness in it. Would it not be well for us to search our hearts, and ask whether there may not be some counterpart to this in our declension from our God, and the consequent suffering to which we have been brought? He loves us too well to allow the process of deterioration to go unchecked.

But here the Almighty Lover of His people resolves to bring His hand to the work of entire purging and cleansing. He will no longer simply punish. He will take away the men who had been His adversaries and enemies from the midst of His people, thoroughly purging away the dross and taking away all the sin. There is an immeasurable difference between punishing and refining. It is a great matter for the soul, when God ceases from the one and commences the other; and when we no longer suffer from the results of past sins, but are restored as at the first, and converted as at the beginning.

Isaiah 2:5

“O house of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the LORD.”

TO what a walk are we called! *In newness of life*: “Like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father.” (Romans 6:4) *In Christ*: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him.” (Colossians 2:6) *Like Christ*: “He that saith he abideth in Him, ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked.” (1 John 2:6) *By and after the Spirit*: “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh.” (Galatians 5:16) *Worthy of God and well pleasing to Him*: “Walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work.” (Colossians 1:10) *In heavenly love, and light, and faith*: “Walk in love” (Ephesians 5:2); “Walk in the light, as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7); “Walk by faith, not by sight.” (2 Corinthians 5:7)

This invitation is primarily addressed to the house of Jacob. Sometimes the elect people are spoken of as Israel; but when *Jacob* is used, they are reminded of the vein of duplicity and chicanery which lies imbedded in their nature. Such people need specially to “walk in the light of the Lord” until the brooding darkness of their nature is dispelled. You will never succeed in ridding yourself of the self-life, with its jealousies and impurities, until you have learned to walk in the light of the Lord. Nothing is so hostile to disease and corruption as light and air; believe me, the one way by which we can become sound and strong is to abide in Christ, that He may abide in us.

Walk involves steps. We cannot enjoy the presence of God as a whole unless it governs and illumines every step. We must be perpetually looking into our Father’s face and asking where to place the next step. We must have fellowship with Him in all things; then we, who have been darkness, will be light in the Lord, and as we walk in the light we shall become children of light.

Isaiah 3:7

“In that day shall he swear, saying, I will not be an healer; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing: make me not a ruler of the people.”

GENERALLY men aspire to be rulers; the emolument and honor of the position are infinitely attractive. But the prophet supposes a case in which the people gather round one who has saved a little more than the others from the general wreck, and entreat him to assume the responsibility of directing public affairs. But he refuses, not wishing to be involved in the disasters that have swept the fatherland. Isaiah cites this as the most complete evidence of the desperate situation brought about by wrongdoing.

It is the mark of great deterioration in a religious community when none are forthcoming to take responsibility, none who have power to lead. It is a grave sentence, “give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them.” (Isaiah 3:4) Never shrink from assuming any responsibility to which God and the Church evidently call you. It is an easier life to remain among the stunted undergrowth; but if God calls you to be a forest tree, with fast spreading branches, humbly accept the opportunity, and fill up its full measure. His grace is sufficient. Better to fail in a great endeavor than to live safely having evaded the Divine call. Have you bread and clothing? account yourself God’s steward.

What a striking contrast is suggested to the love of Jesus Christ! “And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me.” (Isaiah 63:5) He knew that if He espoused the cause of our lost race, it would involve Him in the bitterest agony and woe. But He steadfastly set His face to the accomplishment of our redemption: He stood up to plead our cause: and He will not lay down His chosen work until He hath brought judgment unto victory.

Isaiah 4:5

“And the LORD will create upon every dwelling place of mount Zion, and upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night: for upon all the glory shall be a defence.”

THESE twain, the pillar of cloud by day, and the flaming fire by night, were reserved in the wanderings for the tabernacle only; but this promise predicts that they shall be the heritage of each individual home. “The Lord will create upon every dwelling place of Mount Zion, ... a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night” Each family may have its own cloudy pillar to guide, its own illumination through the dark hours, its own canopy from storm and rain and heat. Let this be your comfort: though your family is scattered afar, all the members may dwell in the same pavilion, be directed by the movements of the same pillar-cloud, and enlightened by the glow of the same fire. In God there is no distance; and they who abide in Him live in a dwelling-place which is wide enough to include the world, but narrow enough to draw our hearts into so small a circle that God and we and our loved ones may touch.

There is even more than this suggested in these words. Each holy soul may have all the gracious contents of this promise, because it has become the temple of the indwelling Lord, through the Holy Spirit. For thee there may be the pillar-cloud, arising to guide thy steps through the wilderness world, or settling down with its fleecy folds to rest. For thee, through long dark nights, the pillar of fire — and, indeed, only the darkness can reveal the bright light in the cloud. For thee also the canopy — for it is written, “the tabernacle of God is with men,” (Revelation 21:3) How God suits Himself to our varying need — now a cloud, again as fire; in the storm a covert, from the heat a shadow. He is always adapting His help to our need.

Isaiah 5:4

“What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?”

THIS is what the Owner of all souls will say of His dealings with each when the discipline and husbandry of time are over. Each of us is God’s vineyard, and for each God has done the best possible. At the end of all things God will have no reason to feel that had He adopted some other method, the barren waste of some heart would have brought forth fruit. It will be seen then, Omniscience itself being witness, that every soul of man had the chance of becoming a fruitful vineyard; and if he became the reverse, it was due to no failure in either the wisdom or grace of God.

It is hard to believe this, hard to think that you would not have done better in some other circumstances; but it is nevertheless true that God could not have done better or more. He has trenched for water, gathered out stones which had hindered your fruitfulness, and planted you with slips from the True Vine. There has been the tower of His protection, and the wine-press of suffering! Ah, how eagerly He has looked that you should bring forth grapes! The pity of it is that there has been nothing but the wild growth of nature! But God cannot take the blame for this. He could not have done more than He has done. Alas that we should have so often thwarted Him!

“When I looked.” “The Father seeketh,” our Savior said. He comes down the garden path full often, seeking from us the fruits of the Spirit, the grace of prayer and supplication, the plants of His delight. “Let us see,” He says, “whether the vine hath budded, and its blossom be opened, and the pomegranates be in flower.” Too often it is as when Jesus looked for figs — there was nothing but leaves!

Isaiah 6:2

“Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.”

SERAPHIM signifies “burning ones,” to designate their essence, their dazzling appearance, or their intense devotion. But whatever the symbol stands for, they needed the six wings. With twain each seraph covered his face — for reverence, he dare not look upon God. With twain he covered his feet — for humility, he recognized that he was unworthy. With twain he did fly — for service and obedience to the Divine commands.

It may be that we are taught that a third part only of our time and energy should be expended in activity; two-thirds to reverent fellowship and communion. Probably with most of us the proportion is in the other direction; and we give two-thirds to flight for God, and one-third only for fellowship with God.

The service that springs from such communion is directed by deep sympathy with the mind of God. The seraph did not wait for the Lord to send him to Isaiah with a live coal from the altar; but spontaneously the son of flame sped to do the required office, as though instinctively he realized that there was nothing else to be done for a man who had confessed himself to be vile. The seraphim have heard that confession made so often, and have so often administered the same restorative to fainting hearts, that they do not need to be directed what to do. They know God’s thought before He speaks a word. A notable emblem this of service!

“One cried to another.” Holy beings love to stir each other to higher themes, to worthier praise. Thus one bird may awake a woodland into minstrelsy; and one Luther an age. Is your heart full of burning love?— then seek to set others aglow.

Isaiah 7:4

“And say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted for the two tails of these smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin with Syria, and of the son of Remaliah.”

SERIOUS trouble seemed imminent. Two strong peoples were bearing down on Jerusalem, and the heart of the house of David was moved as the trees of the forest are moved with the wind. Fear like this demoralizes men and nations. It unfits them for wise and strong action. Hence the necessity that Isaiah should reassure Ahaz with these words.

They were not sent to him because of his righteousness or virtue, for he was one of the weakest and most idolatrous of the kings of David's line; but because his foes were acting in direct collision with the determined counsel and purpose of God. Such a coalition may be threatening you today; but it is in vain for the breakers of human pride and hate to attempt to intrude within limits which God has set around His chosen. Come, my soul, enter thou into thy chamber, and shut thy door about thee! Be quiet! God will fight for you. Be not dismayed; God's purpose cannot be overthrown. Let not thine heart be faint. Lo, a virgin has born a Son, whose name is Immanuel — God with us. “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10,11)

God Incarnate is the end of fear; and the heart that realizes that He is in the midst, that takes heed to the assurance of His loving presence, will be quiet in the midst of alarm. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise in judgment against thee thou shalt condemn. Only be patient and be quiet.

“For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in, the main.”

Isaiah 8:12–13

“Say ye not, A confederacy, to all them to whom this people shall say, A confederacy; neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.”

THE land was panic-stricken for fear of the coalition of Samaria and Damascus. The politicians were seeking the alliance of Assyria, whilst the superstitious had recourse to familiar spirits and wizards. Amid the panic the voice of Isaiah is heard bidding the people fear with only one kind of fear. Not *their* fear, but the fear of God; not *their* dread, but his. The apostle Peter quotes these words, when he says, “But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” (1 Peter 3:14,15).

On the prairies men often fight fire with fire. Against the career of the wall of flame there is but one resource; before it reaches the terrified fugitives they must light a fire to sweep the ground bare, that when the advancing horror reaches the spot there will be no fuel left for it to feed on. So with the heart of man, the only true preservation from fear of our fellows is an overmastering fear of our God. Sanctify Him in your hearts. Let Him be your fear and dread.

It is remarkable that Jacob sware by the Fear of his father Isaac. And this appears to have quieted his heart in the presence of Laban. When the fear of God is strong, the thought of grieving Him, or incurring His just wrath and indignation, is most cogent in warning us from sin! This delivers us from all other fear. One of the greatest sentences a man can utter when tempted to sin or threatened with suffering for the uprightness of his life or the correctness of his creed, is to say simply, quietly, and strongly: “I fear God, and have no other fear.” Fear Him: so shall ye be established; so shall ye prosper.

Isaiah 9:7

“Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”

IS the government of your life upon His shoulder? In olden times the badge of office was worn there, and in some cases a key (Isaiah 22:22). It was on his shoulder that Aaron bore the names of the tribes. The shoulder is the symbol of strength. It is well when the government of our lives rests on the strong Son of God. It is a blessed day in our experience that witnesses the transference of the rule of life to the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God; because all these exalted altitudes of His nature well qualify Him to become the King and Guide of men.

The moment of definitely imposing the government upon the Lord Jesus is generally a marked one in our lives. It stands out as the first of a long series. It is the staple for a chain of successive links, because we are always increasing that government in proportion as we become more familiar with our nature and opportunities, and as new departments of our life open up before us. You were consecrated before marriage, but after you have a home of your own there is a widening of the sphere of Christ's government.

But just in proportion to the increase of His government will be the increase of your peace. As the one extends, so does the other. And he who has extended the dominion of Jesus to the furthest limits of his being, will know most of the peace that passeth understanding. There is Peace where there is Unity; where the soul has but one object to engross its love and aim; where it is able to count on the illimitable stores of its King.

“Yield to the Lord, with simple heart,
All that thou hast and all thou art!
Renounce all strength but strength divine,
And Peace shall be for ever thine!”

Isaiah 10:15

“Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood.”

SHALL the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith?

The Assyrian thought that he was acting on his own impulse, and in his pride congratulated himself on his exploits. The prophet reminded him that it was not so. He was only an axe, a saw, a rod, in the hand of the Eternal God whose supremacy he was inclined to challenge and set at nought.

This thought underlay the apostle’s reply to those who magnified him against Apollos or Cephas. What are we, he cries, but ministers through whom ye believed, even as God granted to each of us? We are only instruments of God’s husbandry, implements through which He fulfils His plans (1 Corinthians 3). It dates an era in the life, when we cease to work for God, and allow God to work through us.

Thoughts like these correct alike pride and despondency. *Pride*, because whatever is the result of our work, we can no more take the credit of it than the pen that wrote the “Paradise Lost” could take to itself the credit of its production. At the best, it is not you, but the grace of God that was with you. You are only a pipe in the organ, but the breath that educed your music was divine. And in *despondency* it is very helpful to remember that if we are nothing, God is all-sufficient; if we have failed, it is the more needful for Him to exert more power. Throw back the responsibility of all results on God. Only see to it that you are a polished shaft, an unblunted saw, and leave Him to do through you what He will.

“So, take and use thy work!
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o’ the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times are in thy hand!
Perfect the cup as plann’d!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!”

Isaiah 11:3

“And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears:”

QUICK of scent! This is the prerogative of all who have received the fullness of the Holy Spirit. We all know the great advantage of having a keen scent. Those who can instantly detect an ill-odour are saved from going into places where pestilence and fever lurk in ambush for life. The whiff of ill-odour startles the unwary passer-by, and warns him that influences inimical to health are brooding nigh. Thus he is arrested and saved.

It is a blessed thing when a man's spiritual senses are exercised to discriminate between the good and bad, the healthy and unhealthy, in literature, amusements, fellowship, and many of the questionable or doubtful things which professing Christians permit. There are many of these which appear innocent enough, like some deadly spot of a jungle where miasma and fever breed; but the deadly scent of corruption will instantly be detected by the Spirit-taught spirit, and the child of God, whose senses are exercised to distinguish between good and evil.

The sense of smell is greatly quickened by inhaling pure air, full of ozone and health, such as breathes about the mountain-brow or the ocean wave. If we return from such scenes, we are more sensitive than ever to foul odours. Live with God's Spirit in holy fellowship, so will you become spiritually quick of scent.

The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us that our senses become quick to distinguish between good and evil by reason of use (Hebrews 5:14). In the first stages of Christian living, temptation may have stolen in upon, and mastered us before we were aware of its presence. But, as years pass, and we become mature through feeding on the meat of the Gospel, we become “quick.”

Isaiah 12:3

“Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.”

S*ALVATION in wells.* It is a fascinating picture. We remember Elim, for instance, where were twelve springs of water. In Jesus there are wells of salvation and blessedness. Do you want Sympathy? Draw it from His tears. Courage? It resides in our Coeur-de-Lion, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Purity? It is His life-blood. Peace? He is the Prince of Peace, the Son of Peace. Meekness? He is meek and lowly in heart. Mercifulness? In Him you will obtain it. Prayerfulness? It is His prime characteristic. There is no quality or grace of the soul which has not its well of supply in the Divine Manhood of our Lord.

But we must draw. Thou hast something to draw with, though not to the eye of man. Faith is the bucket, which we let down into the fullness of the Divine supply. Not simply the general belief that God does answer prayer, but the specific and particular belief that God has answered the prayer for some special needed grace; and that it is yours. *Believe* that ye have received. Do not look into the dripping bucket of your faith to see if you have received; dare to believe that you have received whether you get it or not; and go forth to use what you have, sure that in answer to your appeal you have all sufficiency in all things, that you may abound to every good work.

What joy! There is always joy in some new discovery and acquisition. And oh, the joy of realizing that all the wealth of God's salvation is within our reach; that we may draw for ever without fear of exhaustion; that the Spirit and Bride invite us to end for evermore our thirst, our disquiet, our weary quest!

Isaiah 13:19

“And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.”

THESE prophecies have been fulfilled with marvellous accuracy. It is a pity that so few of our young people in these days study the evidence of prophecy. “Keith’s Evidences” would be a wholesome introduction to this marvellous field of investigation; but every year is adding to the store of proof. Unlike the evidence of miracles, that of prophecy increases with every year of increasing distance from the hour that the prediction was given.

There is a God that judgeth in the earth. Nations, as well as individuals, must stand before His judgment bar. Indeed, the judgment of the nations is now in progress. Already before the Son of Man all nations are being gathered, and He is dividing the sheep from among the goats. Men do not see the sentence of the Divine Judge put into execution, since the operation of His Providence is so deliberate. But in the landscape of history, as we view it from the eminence of the years, we can detect the condign vengeance of the Almighty on the cruel, rapacious, bloodthirsty kingdom of Babylon. She had served God’s purpose, but she had committed such enormous crimes in the process of serving it, that she must be condemned.

The wrongs of the West Indians have, in this generation, been requited upon Spain. It is not possible that modern Turkey should escape. The blood of 100,000 Armenians cries against her from under the altar. But let our beloved country beware! Her opium traffic, her connivance at the sale of firewater to native races, her permission of gross impurity in her streets, her drunkenness, must be telling very heavily against her in the scale of Divine justice. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem!”

Isaiah 14:1

“For the LORD will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob.”

ISRAEL is the pivot around which the history of the world revolves. We cannot understand the trend of events till we know this. As it was in the days of Isaiah, so it is now. Then the rise and fall of Babylon was conditioned by the history of the people whom her kings so greatly despised. Israel needed punishment, and Babylon was raised up to be the rod of God’s vengeance. The precious truths entrusted to Israel needed dissemination throughout the world, and the chosen people were carried captive to Babylon and scattered throughout that vast empire. When seventy years were fulfilled, and the time was ripe for their restoration to their own land, Babylon fell beneath the Medes and Persians, and Cyrus signed the edict for the restoration of Israel.

So, now, it is hardly a matter of doubt that the existing complications of Eastern Europe will never be settled until the chosen people recover the land given by covenant-promise to Abraham, and establish there a free and independent kingdom.

But the practical lesson is, that God bears His people on His heart, and that He is ever engaged in manipulating and governing human affairs for their welfare. He hates putting away. He must keep His promises made to us in Jesus. O backslider, what comfort for thee is here! Israel had surely done her worst to alienate the love of God, and to put herself out of His loving favor. But see how He had compassion and chose her again. Take heart! He will restore thee, as at the first, and bless thee, setting thee again in the old place of favor and privilege. “Return unto Me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts.” (Malachi 3:7)

Isaiah 15:5

“My heart shall cry out for Moab; his fugitives shall flee unto Zoar, an heifer of three years old: for by the mounting up of Luhith with weeping shall they go it up; for in the way of Horonaim they shall raise up a cry of destruction.”

MOAB was once thickly populated, and very fertile. But the country is now strewn with ruins; a few broken shafts of columns alone are standing, and deep wells cut into the heart of rock. That such a civilization should pass so entirely away, leaving no trace behind it, must have seemed most unlikely to the prophet's contemporaries; but these words have been literally fulfilled. So shall others of prophecy be fulfilled; and, indeed, each morning's dawn witnesses some further approach to their accomplishment.

It is to be noticed that the man of God takes no pleasure in these desolations, though Israel and Moab had been perpetually at feud. He speaks of the *burden* of Moab. Is not this the manner in which we should consider and proclaim the doom of the ungodly? Oh to preach of eternal judgment with wet eyes! Oh to tell men, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ! Oh to know the burdened heart, burdened even to breaking!

This is the only preaching which touches the heart of the unsaved. To announce their doom with metallic voice and unperturbed manner will only harden; but to speak with streaming eyes, and the eloquence of a broken heart, will touch the most callous. It is the broken heart that breaks hearts. Tears start tears. May our merciful High Priest impart to us His compassion and mercies, and lay on our hearts some of His burdens for dying men; that as we behold the cities we may weep, and that there may be a trembling in our voices as we proclaim the fearful woe that awaits the godless and impenitent.

Isaiah 16:5

“And in mercy shall the throne be established: and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David, judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness.”

IN those days thrones were not generally established in mercy; but in blood, and cruelty, and savage might. Addressing Moab, the prophet advises that in the hour of her anguish, when her fugitives gather at the fords of the Arnon, in their mad flight from before the conqueror, they should make peace with their ancient enemies the Jews, and appease their hatred, that the outcasts may find shelter in the Land of Promise. And he goes on to say, that when this should come to pass, their piteous appeal for protection will be generously met, because the throne shall at that time be established in mercy. The ancient causes of enmity will be forgotten; the old feuds will be condoned; and the protection of Israel will be to the trembling crowds of refugees like the shadow of a high rock flung across the sand, when all the land is baking in the noontide glare.

Who can this be that sits on the throne of David, combining mercy with truth, seeking righteousness in his judgment, and swift to act on the behalf of the oppressed! None other than the Prince of the House of David, of whose kingdom there can be no end. Art thou a fugitive, driven from thy nest, and rushing to and fro as a scared and trembling bird (Isaiah 16:2)? Is the glare of the sun scorching thee? Dost thou stand at the fords of Arnon, with enemies behind, and death in front? Send ye lambs to the Mount of Zion; make peace with her King; invoke His forgiveness and salvation. Remember that though He is a great King, His throne is established in mercy. And His shadow shall be as the night in the midst of the noonday; He will hide the outcast, and will not betray the wanderer (Isaiah 16:3).

Isaiah 17:10–11

“Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the rock of thy strength, therefore shalt thou plant pleasant plants, and shalt set it with strange slips: In the day shalt thou make thy plant to grow, and in the morning shalt thou make thy seed to flourish: but the harvest shall be a heap in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow.”

HOW many among us might be addressed in these solemn words! Many are planting pleasant plants, which they hope will one day be beautiful in appearance; whilst from the slips they hope to rear fruit trees. One man is planting his schemes for making a fortune; another is setting slips that should bring him success and renown; yet another is busy in creating a political or religious movement that is intended to benefit mankind. The workers in the village allotment gardens in the early spring are an apt illustration of what politicians, company-mongers, and society-leaders, are attempting in other spheres.

But of what avail are all our preparations, so long as we forget the God of our salvation and are unmindful of the Rock of our strength? We shall never garner the harvest without His help and blessing. The day of grief and desperate sorrow will inevitably visit us, and sweep away all the results of our toils. The co-operation and blessing of God, sought in answer to prayer, cannot be left out of our calculations, if we are to win lasting success.

And is not the reverse also true? Supposing that we remember the God of our salvation, and are ever mindful of the Rock of our strength: may we not infer that our pleasant plants will root themselves, and our slips bear fruit in the coming years to the glory and praise of God, and for the blessing of thirsty wayfarers? “These simple teachings of farm and field knock continually at the doors of our own blessedness, with intent that we may enter therein, and find our home in the will of God, and our permanent lodging under the shadow of the Almighty.”

Isaiah 18:4

“For so the LORD said unto me, I will take my rest, and I will consider in my dwelling place like a clear heat upon herbs, and like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest.”

ASSYRIA was marching against Ethiopia, the people of which are described as tall and smooth. And as the armies advance, God makes no effort to arrest them; it would seem as though they will be allowed to work their will. He is still watching them from His dwelling-place; the sun still shines on them; the dews refresh them. But before the harvest, when the flowers are becoming ripening grapes, the whole of the proud array of Assyria is smitten as easily as when sprigs are cut off by the pruning-hook of the husbandman.

Is not this a marvelous conception of God — being still and watching? His stillness is not acquiescence. His silence is not consent. He is only biding His time, and will arise, in the most opportune moment, and when the designs of the wicked seem on the point of success, to overwhelm them with disaster. As we look out on the evil of the world; as we think of the apparent success of wrong-doing; as we wince beneath the oppression of those that hate us, let us remember these marvelous words about God being still and beholding.

There is, however, another side to this. Jesus beheld His disciples toiling at the oars through the stormy night; and watched, though unseen, the successive steps of the anguish at Bethany, where Lazarus slowly passed through the stages of mortal sickness, till he succumbed and was borne to the rocky tomb. But He was only waiting the moment when He could interpose most effectually. Is He still to thee? He is not unobservant: He is beholding all things: He has His finger on thy pulse, keenly sensitive to all its fluctuations. He will come to save thee when the precise moment has arrived.

Isaiah 19:24–25

“In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.”

IT is very wonderful to find such expressions in the mouth of a Jew. It shows what an effect that coal of fire had produced on the lips of Isaiah. It had led him to know something of the love of God which overleaps the barriers of nationality and caste, and gives itself to all who humbly seek after Him.

We have here the foreshadowing of an age, yet to be revealed, when the long discipline of God’s dealings with men shall be consummated in their conversion to God. What a radiant prospect is thus suggested to us, when the most inveterate enemies of God’s Church shall be received into her borders and regarded with the favor that God shows to His people! Who, standing amid the terrors of the plagues, could ever have supposed that Egypt would be addressed as “my people”? Who could have thought that Assyria, the tyrant persecutor, would ever be called “the work of my hands”? Yet these are the trophies and triumphs of Divine grace. Our Shepherd has many sheep, which are not of the Jewish fold: these also He must bring; and there shall be one flock, one Shepherd. Never despair of any, for God’s grace abounds over mountains.

But Israel is always His inheritance. There he finds rest and home, for the Lord’s portion is His people. Oh to know the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints! The soil of our life is poor and thin, the aspect bad, the stones many; but He who chose us will yet vindicate Himself, and if He has to empty heaven of its wealth He will do it rather than fail of His eternal purpose. Naaman asked for two mules’ burdens of earth; but Christ can spare more than that, and will, to make the soil of a godly character.

Isaiah 20:6

“And the inhabitant of this isle shall say in that day, Behold, such is our expectation, whither we flee for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria: and how shall we escape?”

THE argument is as follows — Assyria, according to Isaiah’s prophecies, would sweep down on Ethiopia, and take them into captivity; and when this happened, the inhabitants of the coast-line, which we know as Philistia, would have reason to fear indeed. If Ethiopia and Egypt, to whom they looked for aid, could not withstand the mighty northern nation, how hopeless it was for dwellers on the littoral to expect to withstand it by themselves!

The moral is obvious, and it is well pointed by the apostle Peter when he says: “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” (1 Peter 4:17, 18) Scarcely saved! It is as though our salvation tasked the resources of the Eternal God to the uttermost. He had grace and strength enough, but none to spare. Blood and tears and heart-break were the price with which our redemption was secured! How then will they escape who venture forth into the storm which soon shall break upon our world, apart from the only salvation which can withstand its fury? “For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; ...” (Hebrews 2:2, 3)

A pious man, when death approached, longed to die in triumph for the conversion of his sons. Instead, his soul was overwhelmed with gloom. But this was used of God to the conversion of the whole family, for they said: If so good a man died in the dark, what will become of *us*?

Isaiah 21:11

“The burden of Dumah. He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?”

ACROSS the desert spaces a voice was heard calling from the land of Esau, calling to the prophet, to know whether the long night of Assyrian oppression was nearly over. He stood on the hills of Zion watching the dawn, as the priests were accustomed to do, that they might give the first signal for the offering of the morning sacrifice. The question, “Watchman, what of the night?” was repeated twice as if the weary sufferers were at their last gasp.

The prophet’s answer was enigmatical. The morning was already on its way; but the night was chasing it, spreading her raven wings in the same sky — “The morning cometh, and also the night.” (Isaiah 21:12) Morning for Israel, but night for Edom; but if Edom would repent, she might come again with her inquiries to find that for her also God had turned the shadow of death into the morning.

Never in the history of the ages have men looked more eagerly towards the Eastern sky, or inquired more persistently, What of the night? What of the night? To those that watch the Eastern sky, standing on the mount of vision afforded by the Word of God, there is but one answer: The morning cometh, but also the night. The morning of millennial glory, and of the bridal chamber; of the taking home of the saints, and the revelation of Jesus Christ: but the night of unutterable sorrow to the servant who knew the Lord’s will and did it not, and to the world which would not have this Man to reign over it. Yet if individuals will but turn from darkness to light, and from Satan to God, they will be welcomed, and receive an inheritance amongst the children of the morning. “Come ye again, come”

Isaiah 22:22

“And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”

THE Divine Man stands behind the earthly type in these words in majestic beauty. “These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth; I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.” (Revelation 3:7,8) Words of incomparable splendor, capable of endless application.

Let Jesus open each day of service, each opportunity of ministry, each door into another soul, each new chamber of life, and knowledge, and opportunity; and remember that He who sets before us open doors is He who knows our works, and that we have but little strength. He will never open a door leading into a passage of life which is too difficult for our strength to tread. The open door will reveal to us possibilities within our reach of which we had not dreamt; and when once a door is opened, though access to it may be beset, as in Bunyan’s vision, by armed men, and though strong pressure is brought to bear upon it for its closing, let us dare to persevere against disease and pestilence and opposition, relying on these sublime words, *None shall shut*. Dear soul, say it to thyself repeatedly, *None shall shut*.

But the Lord shuts doors. “they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.” (Acts 16:7) Down a long corridor of closed doors we may sometimes have to pass. It seems heartbreaking to see doors labeled, *Friendship, Love, Home*, shut against us; but beyond them there is the one unclosed door through which we shall enter into our true life. Oh do not lose heart and hope in useless weeping over the closed doors of the past. Follow Him, who has the keys.

Isaiah 23:4

“Be thou ashamed, O Zidon: for the sea hath spoken, even the strength of the sea, saying, I travail not, nor bring forth children, neither do I nourish up young men, nor bring up virgins.”

ZIDON is bidden to be ashamed because she is suddenly left childless; and this to an Eastern woman was shame indeed. And the prophet, personifying Zidon as the City of the Sea, describes the sea herself as lamenting. It is as though the sea took up Zidon’s complaint at the destruction of her children, and spoke in all her multitudinous waves.

With what different tones the sea speaks! Sometimes in the musical breath of her wavelets on the beach; or the long drawl of the shingle in the recession of the retiring billow; or in the rising storm, when the waters lift up their voice; or in the angry roar of the mighty waves far out at sea. Speaking in whispers and in thunder; speaking to itself and to God under the canopy of night! The sea-voices are not the least amongst those of nature. Old Ocean seems to us sometimes like a great organ on which every note of the heart is represented.

And what are the wild waves saying? Listen! “We are his, for He made us; we own his sway, for He once trod our crests; his voice is as the voice of many waters; his thoughts are deep as our profoundest depths; his throne stands beside the sea of glass mingled with fire; his least word is omnipotent over our wildest fury.”

But the sea shall one day speak for the last time. The lonely soul of the beloved apostle, which had so often listened to the chime of the Aegean waves around his island prison, rejoiced to know that the sea should one day be no more. No more the speech of the storm; no more the mournful cadence of the retiring wavelet at night telling of separation and loneliness. “For the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.” (Revelation 21:1)

Isaiah 24:16

“From the uttermost part of the earth have we heard songs, even glory to the righteous. But I said, My leanness, my leanness, woe unto me! the treacherous dealers have dealt treacherously; yea, the treacherous dealers have dealt very treacherously.”

THIS chapter exceeds in sublimity. The prophet first describes the general desolation about to overtake the world of his time, when, through the ruthless invasions of Nebuchadnezzar, it would become utterly emptied and spoiled. He describes the earth as languishing and fading away, and the high ones of the people languishing (Isaiah 24:4). Polluted nature is depicted as groaning in bitter anguish beneath the enormous sins of men, who had transgressed the law, changed the ordinance, and broken the everlasting covenant of their God. All joy is darkened; the mirth of the land is gone.

The scene is changed, and our thought is turned from the judgment and punishment of the wicked, to the blessed lot of the people of God; we are taught to see the Lord of Hosts reigning on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously. And all who see it are compelled to confess that it is well with his people who are under such a King. And as that spectacle is beheld by the sons of men, as they compare their misery with the light and joy of the people of God, they lift up their voices and sing. They shall lift up their voice, they shall shout; for the majesty of the Lord, they shall cry aloud from the sea. Where morning lights her fires they shall glorify Him; and from the uttermost parts of the earth songs roll home in a tumult of ecstasy, “Glory, glory to the righteous.”

It is a true sentence. Though for our discipline, and to fit us to minister to men, we are often passed through the fiery furnace, yet on the whole it is well with us. Ours is the peace of God; ours the knowledge that love is over all; ours the anticipation of a morning that shall never be overcast.

Isaiah 25:8

“He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it.”

IN this ode, which Isaiah prepared for singing when Babylon the first should have fallen, the apostle, taught by the Holy Ghost, saw an anticipation of the triumph of the saints, when the strong bastions of death should be destroyed before the coming of Him who is the resurrection and the life. “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.” (1 Corinthian 15:53) In these words he refers to the first stage in the Second Advent, when the living saints shall be changed, and those who have died shall be raised; and then he proceeds to quote these words, “So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Corinthian 15:54)

There can be no doubt that this is Paul’s prayer for himself. He says, “not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.” (2 Corinthian 5:4) No doubt it would be very delightful! None of the pains of dissolution; no going forth of the unclothed spirit; but the sudden subliming and transfiguring of the mortal, as ice passes into water, or water into vapor. It is not to be wondered at that the prophet adds, “and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces;” (Isaiah 25:8) In the rapture of reunion, in the glad embrace of eternity, in the consciousness that death and trouble are for ever behind, and that God has kept his word, we shall forget how to weep!

The prophet also records the triumphant song which will break from myriads of glad spirits, when the hope of the Church will be realized, and her long patience rewarded: “And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” (Isaiah 25:9)

Isaiah 26:3

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”

THE Hebrew is very significant. “Perfect peace” is *Peace, peace*. As though the soul dwelt within double doors, like some chambers which we have entered, which had double windows against the noise of the street, and a baize door within the ordinary one to deaden the sound of voices from the next apartment. Understand, dear soul, that it is thy privilege to live inside the double doors of God’s loving care. He says to thee, “Peace, peace.” If one assurance is not enough, He will follow it with a second and a third. The city is strong, the bulwarks and walls are massive, salvation is appointed and prepared; but the gates do not frown with iron or move heavily on hinges of stone, they open musically and gently.

We remember how, on the evening of His resurrection, our Lord spoke the double peace. Peace, because of His wounds, the peace of the justified; and peace, because He was sending His apostles forth, as the Father had sent Him. The one is the peace of the evening, when we come back to our home, wounded and soiled: the other of the morning, when we dwell in the will of Him who chose our lot and path. His blood and His will — these are the double doors of our peace.

We must see to it that our mind is stayed on God. For *mind* the margin suggests *imagination*. It is through our imaginings that we get perturbed and defiled. We anticipate and fancy so many ogres; we harbor such dark forebodings; chambers of imagery are thrown open to such unseemly company; hence our perturbation. Do not imagine, but trust; do not anticipate, but leave God to choose. “Looking forward strains the eyesight; looking upward opens heaven.”

Isaiah 27:5

“Or let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me.”

SUCH are the alternatives. You must either resist God’s strength, or take hold of it. If the former, it is as though thorns and briars should fight flame. There is no fury in God; He has no desire for the death of the ungodly, but that he should turn from his unrighteousness and live. Yet if the blinded soul persists in flinging itself into collision with Him, it must suffer finally and irretrievably. But notice the double invitation, “Let him take hold of my strength; that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me.”

Where shall I find His strength? the sinner asks. In the mighty mountains girded with strength; in the arch of the sky; in the break of the ocean wave? No, not in these; but where that dying Man pours out His soul unto death, and is numbered with the transgressors. But surely *there* is the *weakness* of God, not the strength! Nay, but it is the strength. The weakness of God is stronger than men. “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:23,24)

Come hither, soul of man, the strength of God is in that pierced, transfixed hand. Take hold of it, it will lift thee. In Him God is reconciled; there is nothing to do but take the offered mercy, accept His reconciliation, and be at peace. God is reconciled; be thou reconciled. God has made peace; be thou at peace. God reaches out His hand; take hold of it. God draws nigh; draw nigh to Him. Then He will keep thee, whatever be thy foes or temptation; His protecting strength will interpose between them and thee. He will keep thee night and day (Isaiah 27:3).

“Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin?”

The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.”

Isaiah 28:5

“In that day shall the LORD of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty, unto the residue of his people,”

WHAT many, like the drunkards of Ephraim, as described here, seek in the exhilarating stimulus of wine, God’s people seek and find in Himself! Notice the variety of His attributes. There is something for every one. Are you eager for glory? There is no reputation or fame equal to having His smile, the consciousness of being well pleasing to Him — *He will be a crown of glory*. Do you recognize the deformity and unloveliness of your character, and desire beauty? *He will be a diadem of beauty*. Do you desire a right judgment in all things, so as to be able to direct large and important undertakings? *He will be a spirit of judgment*, (Isaiah 28:6) when you will be in judgment. Submit your judgment to Him, that He may think through your mind, or direct you to a just conclusion. Are there days when the enemy threaten to carry your soul by assault, and is already at the gates? Then turn to Jesus, and He will be your strength. Yes, and in great crises, when evil is predominant, and the citadel of faith and righteousness threatens to be submerged before the weltering chaos, when no other help is near, as you look to the Captain of the Lord’s Host, you will suddenly find yourself enabled to roll back the dark battalions, in the very hour of victory.

Let us live in closer fellowship with our glorious Lord. They who receive the abundance of His grace shall reign. Out of His fullness may all receive, and grace for grace. “In that day” on Christ’s lips always meant the day of Pentecost; and it is only through the grace of the Holy Spirit that we can avail ourselves of the treasured resources of the Ascended Christ.

“He shall suffice me, for He hath sufficed.”

Isaiah 29:19

“The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.”

BLESSED are the meek,” “Blessed are the poor in spirit,” said the Lord. (Matthew 5) What is meekness, and why are meek and poor men so signally blessed with joy? Meekness is different from lowliness and humility. It is our attitude in the presence of our detractors and persecutors — not retaliating, nor opposing force to force, but bowing in silence and submission before high-handed wrong. It was in such a spirit of meekness that Jesus suffered Himself to be led as a lamb to the slaughter; and instead of calling for legions of angels, suffered Caiaphas’ armed band to bind Him. This spirit is not natural to us. It is in our nature to retaliate and avenge ourselves. We want to call for fire, or legions of armored angels from the heaven of God. But this is not the way of peace or joy.

But the Holy Spirit waits to reproduce in us the meekness of Jesus. Then, when you meet all injury and unkindness with an unfailing Christian courtesy, bending like a rush before the storm, to rise when it has passed over, you will have joy. Joy, because God will comfort you: because you have not lost yourself in the heat of passion, but have tried to turn others away from their evil purpose: because your hands could not have vindicated or extricated yourself, as God’s hand: and because you realize that the passive virtues are stronger, and the patience of Jesus Christ will win the kingdom. Those who fret and fume and storm through life, always standing on their rights, and insisting on being respected and consulted, are in perpetual perturbation. But the meek inherit the earth. All the best comes to them at last. God makes them His special charge. And as they tread the path of Jesus, they share His joy.

Isaiah 30:18

“And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for him.”

AS long as the people tried to help themselves, sending ambassadors to Egypt, and seeking an alliance against the invader, God could do nothing for them; He could only wait until they returned to simple reliance upon Himself. In returning to trust and rest they would be saved. At first they said *No*. They were opposed to the idea of simple trust in God. It seemed impossible to believe that if they simply rested on Him, He would do better for them than their most strenuous exertions could do for themselves. And all the while God was waiting till every expedient failed, and they were reduced to such a condition that He could step in and save them.

How like this is to much in our lives! It is long before we learn the lesson of returning and rest; of quietness and confidence. We will trust in chariots and horses, and ride upon the swift. It is, of course, right to use the means; but our strong temptation is to put them in the place of God, and trust them. You are trying to save yourself from the just penalty of your sin, from the pursuit of your foes, from perplexing combinations and complications of circumstances; you have been running backwards and forwards, flurried and excited. At how many doors you have knocked to find them closed; and all the while God has been waiting to be gracious to you, waiting till you came to the end of yourself; waiting, till like a spent struggler in the water, you ceased from your mad efforts and cast yourself back upon His strong everlasting love. He is exalted to have mercy; but He is a God of judgment, or literally, of method. He can only save in one way. Blessed are they that wait for Him. The soul that waits for God will always find the God for whom he waits.

Isaiah 31:5

“As birds flying, so will the LORD of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it; and passing over he will preserve it.”

IT was a beautiful conception, for Jerusalem was perched on Mount Zion, as some bird's nest in the cleft of the rocks. Lo! Sennacherib approaches as the hawk, hovering above the fledglings of the nest. But just as the mother-bird gathers her young under her wing, and places herself between her treasures and threatening peril, so would the eternal God spread those wings, under which Ruth came to trust in the old time, over the entire city. To Isaiah there was no cause for fear when Sennacherib's legions were encamped on the mountains of Zion. He, at least, realized that the pinions of Almighty were between the cowering citizens and the dreaded foe. Warm and safe was such abiding.

How wonderful that Jesus should have appropriated this metaphor, and spoken of Himself as willing to gather Jerusalem under His wing to save her from a more terrible fate! Does it not bespeak His consciousness of Deity that He should hide the people under the shadow of His care?

This may be our daily portion. The Lord of Hosts will be strong as the lion that growls over his prey, undismayed by the multitude of shepherds that shout at him; and He will be sweet and soft and gentle as a mother-bird. Always believe that Jesus stands between you and what you dread. Even now He is passing over you. Do you not hear Him saying, “If you seek Me, let these go their way”? Isaac Pennington, an old follower of George Fox, who had considerable experience of the prisons of his time, said he often felt the healing drop from the wings of Christ. The sense of God's presence and of His power are as two wings, beneath which the believer nestles, till calamities be overpast.

Isaiah 32:17

“And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever.”

RIGHTEOUSNESS must precede peace.

In the government of a Holy God. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews clearly affirms that Melchizedek, a type of Christ, is first King of Righteousness and then King of Peace. In Romans 5 the apostle shows how the righteousness of God has been vindicated, and will be imparted to those that believe; and then says, “Being justified, . . . we have peace with God.”

In our inner life. Many seek for peace apart from righteousness. They refuse to adjust some wrong in their lives which calls aloud against them. They refuse to permit the light of God’s Spirit to ransack their past, because they are conscious that to do so will expose themselves to the inevitable need of confession and restitution; and as they will not submit to the laying of the foundations of peace, they miss the peace. So far as you know, you must be right, before you can have peace.

In men’s dealings with each other. Be sure to go to the bottom of disputes and disagreements. There is a right and a wrong in every question. It is always wise to lay the foundations of justice at any cost, assured that peace will inevitably result sooner or later. Honeyed words will not abide; but just deeds are a permanent basis for a happy and lasting reconciliation.

How blessed that for evermore our peace is secured! The righteous shall never need to leave their peaceful habitation, or to quit their sure dwellings. However it may hail to the downfall of the forest trees, storms shall never drive them from their quiet resting-places, since they are founded upon the righteousness as well as the grace of God.

Isaiah 33:2

“O LORD, be gracious unto us; we have waited for thee: be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble.”

THIS is an exquisite morning prayer, and the beauty of it is that it is so sweetly unselfish. It begins by appealing for the grace of God, but goes on to ask that He would be as an arm of loving support and deliverance to others, before the suppliant turns back to ask for salvation for himself in time of trouble. “Be Thou *their* arm;... *our* salvation also.” If you want God’s arm for yourself, ask that it may be given to some one else. If you want salvation in the time of trouble, pray that God would give His arm for the help of your neighbour.

We all want that arm every morning. The gladdest, fairest day that ever broke for us, or will break, must have been marked, or will be marked, by pitfalls and snares. The path may begin with greensward; but before the evening it will have opened upon stones and steep ascents, and you will need the arm of your Beloved on which to lean. But you will never ask for it in vain. It will be always at hand. Be sure, like the Shulamite, to come up out of the wilderness, leaning on your Beloved. And whatever else you forget in your morning prayer, never forget to ask for the strong, tender arm of God. O woman, bereaved of the strong arm on which thou wert wont to lean, will not this suffice thee!

Is not this a comprehensive prayer for dear ones far away or near? Be their arm, Heavenly Father, today. If I may not be there to give the strength of my arm, let thine be their stay, and Thou wilt do better than had been possible, had I been by their side. Then, when the hour of trouble comes, and you ask that He should be your salvation, the glorious Lord will be a place of broad rivers and streams.

Isaiah 34:8

“For it is the day of the LORD’S vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion.”

THESSE chapters remind us that there is a God that judgeth in the earth. The tendency of the present day is to reduce all things to the operation of natural law, and to crowd God out of his own world; as though He had no longer as much power as a judge or magistrate to inflict punishment! Here He comes out of the silence of eternity to avenge the wrongs of His people perpetrated upon them by Edom. The Jews could never forget that when they were in the extremity of their conflict with Babylon, Edom rejoiced and said, “Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.” (Psalm 137:7) Now, at length, God would vindicate His people, and punish the proud land whose sins cried to Heaven.

Let us remember that God works not only through natural law, but by sudden manifest interpositions of His providence; and when He arises on behalf of the meek, the result is not only terrible but lasting. It seems as though God’s judgment on Edom and other peoples, which has left their lands as desolate scars on the face of the earth, are instances of the permanence of God’s decrees, and of their irreversibility: “The smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever.” (Isaiah 34:10) It was often told by the Waldenses, how the prince that broke the covenant with them and drove them across the Swiss mountains, died of a broken heart at the death of his first-born.

God does not appear always to avenge the wrongs of His people in the present life. The wicked pass away amid their ill-gotten prosperity, but in the next world their evil deeds come back to roost in their own hearts.

Isaiah 35:8

“And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.”

THIS chapter is full of blessed prevision of a state of perfect blessedness, when the curse that has so long brooded over the world shall be removed. Into that sweet and blessed country there is a way from the present: it is the way of holiness.

It is a way. Our holiness is progressive. Though we may perfectly obey up to the limit of our knowledge, that knowledge is ever on the increase, beckoning our advance. Before us lies the path marked out by the footsteps of Jesus, climbing from strength to strength, and we are called to walk in it.

It is a highway. That is, it is for every one that will. It is kept in repair under the King's own orders. There are no toll-gates on its straight line of route. It is like those Roman roads which traversed countries from end to end, and remain today imperishable monuments of the skill of their constructors.

It is closed against the unclean. The leper of old was forbidden to obstruct the thoroughfare. The unclean soul is equally forbidden to taint that holy way. God's first requirement of us is separation.

This way is always trodden by Jesus. He shall be with them. The holy soul has a Divine Companion. For the most part those who tread this way do so as part of a great host; but when the path seems lonely, He goes beside who walked to Emmaus.

It is plainly defined. Wayfaring men, though fools, need make no mistake. Be true to the Bible, to the holy instincts of your soul, and, above all, to the blessed Comforter who guides all. The way may sometimes be paved with jagged flints; but keep in it, it is safe walking, and it leads home.

Isaiah 36:21

“But they held their peace, and answered him not a word: for the king’s commandment was, saying, Answer him not.”

IT was very bitter for Hezekiah and Isaiah that these words of vituperation and abuse were spoken in the open air, the voice of the speaker travelling far enough to be heard by the whole population in Jerusalem. Rabshakeh loudly reminded them that Egypt was a broken reed; then suggested that Hezekiah’s recent raid against the idolatry which had grown up in his country must have alienated the God of Israel; then that God Himself had sent him to destroy the land; and lastly, he quoted the long list of conquests that had fallen to the share of his master. What could Hezekiah do against the conqueror of Sepharvaim and other proud cities, which were level with the ground? To all of which the king ordered they should give no reply.

Silence is our best reply to the allegations and taunts of our foes. Be still, O persecuted soul! Hand over thy cause to God. It is useless to argue, even in many cases to give explanations. Be still, and commit thy cause to God. He has heard every word, and will answer. Thus Jesus also held His peace, when falsely accused:—

“He stood alone,

Silent amidst their clamour — He whose voice

Of power but late suffic’d to ope the grave!

‘Others He saved — Himself He cannot save!’

O mystic silence! how divine thy choice.”

But before going into this conflict be sure that, like Hezekiah, thou hast put from thee all that is false and evil. The iconoclasm of the good king which Rabshakeh so curiously misinterpreted was, after all, his main security. It is necessary that there should be no controversy between God and the soul which He is to defend.

Isaiah 37:14

“And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it: and Hezekiah went up unto the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD.”

PROBABLY he literally handed in the letter to God, opening it and laying it down in the Holy Place, as though the responsibility of dealing with its contents no longer devolved upon himself.

The post and telegraph are great factors in modern life. They are perpetually bringing to us documents of one kind and another, which involve anxious thought. Sometimes a heavy account for expenditure which has been necessarily and righteously incurred; or a story of wrong-doing on the part of some near relative; or some piteous appeal for help. Indeed, not unseldom, letters like this that Rabshakeh addressed to Hezekiah may fall into our lap. We read with beating hearts, and know not what to say, and finally go into the presence of God and spread it out. Answer it for us, great God, we entreat Thee!

The Divine reply came first in the blessed assurance sent through Isaiah; and next when the angel of the Lord spread his wings on the blast, and breathed on the face of the foe as he passed. (Isaiah 37:36) Let us more habitually hand over our anxieties and cares to God. God calls us to enter into His rest, i.e., to place Himself and His care between us and all that would hurt or annoy. “Doth God take care for oxen.” (1 Corinthians 9:9) and will He not care for his children? Is a falling sparrow more to Him than his child? Hath He brought us so far on our journey to put us to shame? Only let us be sure that we have given no just cause for the unkind tone of the letters, or brought ourselves into a false position with respect to those who hate God. Daily exercise yourself to have a conscience void of offence: then, with God on your side, you can face a world in arms.

Isaiah 38:17

“Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.”

IT is as though from the pit’s mouth and onward there had been one long succession of loving thoughts and words. Or it may be that the love of God has loved us out of the pit of corruption. Let that pit of corruption stand for the evil of our own hearts, the abysmal depths of our selfishness, the lustings and fightings of our flesh. What could have saved us from all these, but the love of God?

The Patience of God’s love.— God’s patience has been greatly magnified in us, that He has borne with us so tenderly. If God had been less than infinite, He must long ago have renounced us in despair. Oh, the riches of His long-suffering! He has lingered near the pit of our corruption, drawing us from it with untiring solicitude, even when we have repeatedly cast ourselves back into it with ungrateful persistence.

The Sacrifices of God’s love.— How much He has borne and suffered! The cross, with its shame and spitting, seems to be but a revelation, in terms that we can understand, of the pain that lies always on His heart, and of the inestimable cost our sin involves. It is this Divine sorrow which purifies us, as we devoutly consider it.

The Purity of God’s love.— What a contrast between some fetid pool and the over-arching blue of heaven! Such is God’s love as contrasted with our hate; His sweetness with our chidings, His holiness with our corruption. But His love conquers our sin, and draws us out of the pit. Where sin abounds, His grace much more abounds, and makes us loving and lovely.

“Thou art the victor, Love!”

Isaiah 39:4

“Then said he, What have they seen in thine house? And Hezekiah answered, All that is in mine house have they seen: there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shewed them.”

IN the book of the Chronicles there is a suggestion which shows the hidden evil that lurked beneath Hezekiah's attitude to these Babylonish ambassadors. “Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him; for his heart was lifted up, therefore there was wrath upon him.” (2 Chronicles 32:25) Beyond all other sin, pride is abhorrent to God as the parent of other sins, and it was this accursed principle that prompted Hezekiah to that outburst of ostentation. He did not care to remember that he had nothing which he had not first received, and that at the best he was only a trustee of God's gifts for others. You will remember that by this sin fell the angels. It was when Nebuchadnezzar surveyed Babylon from the roof of his palace that he was suddenly smitten with madness.

Be very careful to watch against ostentation and the pride from which it springs. The best antidote is the habit of looking from the gifts to the Giver, and to accustom yourself to the position of a steward of the benefits which have been done to you. Oh for more of the spirit of praise and thanksgiving, of adoring gratitude, of grateful love! Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name be all the glory, O Lord God. All things come of Thee: wealth, and the power to get it; love, and the qualities that earn it; success, and the health of body and mind so needful to its acquisition. No doubt Hezekiah's sad lapse is intended as a warning to us all. The minuteness with which it is recorded may be intended to impress on us the danger of coquetting with the Babylon around us. It is impossible to do so without becoming ultimately carried into captivity to its corruption.

Isaiah 40:1

“Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.”

THERE is a considerable interval between the preceding chapter and this. The Jews are now nearing the term of their long and bitter sufferings; their fiery trials have done their work.

Comfort, because sin is forgiven. — “Look to the wounds of Jesus, brother,” said Staupitz to Luther. At the foot of the cross alone can sinners be comforted. We need not only the assurance of forgiveness, but some knowledge of the way in which it has been obtained, and the grounds on which it is based. Our hearts are never truly comforted till we learn that God is faithful and just when He forgives.

Comfort, because God is on His way to deliver.— The imagery is borrowed from the progress of an Oriental prince or conqueror. Great gangs of men are sent to level the ways before him. Be of good cheer, the prophet says; your God shall come with a strong hand. See the mountains become a way; the crooked is made straight and the rough places smooth. The glorious Lord comes to deliver the afflicted from his strong oppressor, and all flesh shall see it together.

Comfort, because the Strong Deliverer has a tender heart. — He comes as a mighty one, but He feeds His flock like a shepherd. Strong and sweet, mighty and merciful. The Everlasting Father, but the Prince of Peace. Those arms sustain the universe, but they gather lambs.

Comfort, because He faints not, neither is weary. — Others may tire after awhile. Physical strength droops and declines. Time seems long. The current may sweep lovers and friends out of our reach, but Thou remainest! “The Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary.” (Isaiah 40:28)

Isaiah 41:10

“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

WE are all tempted to look around us, to see who is prepared to stand by and help us. We are apt, like the apostle, to look at the winds and waves. Not so, says our God. Look not around, but look off to Me; look unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.

These exceeding great and precious promises quicken our desire to be able to establish our lineage as belonging to Abraham. We very gladly catch at the apostle’s assurance that those who have his faith may claim to be his children. It is good to know that, Gentiles as we are, we may be included in the Israel of God.

Now, troubled soul, look unto these words. They are spoken by one who cannot lie, and spoken for thee. They are as much meant for thee as though they had never been claimed by another; and God is prepared to fulfill them in thy life to the brim. He is with thee at this moment, whilst thou art pondering these words. He is thy God, and will never act unworthily of thy trust. Where thou art weakest and most easily overcome, He will strengthen thee. Where thou needest help, He will give His, so that thy difficult task shall be easily mastered. And when thou art too weary to walk; when no more strength remains in thee; when thou sinkest on the battlefield or the steep hill — He will uphold thee. Dost thou doubt? Behold at His right hand, Jesus sits, thy Lover and Savior. It is a right hand of righteousness, that can never act unworthily of itself, or fail the trusting soul.

“The steps of faith

Fall on the seeming void — and find

The rock beneath!”

Isaiah 42:3

“A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth.”

THIS is characteristic of Jesus Christ. Our great enemy argues so differently. He says, See! it is but a piece of smoldering tow; blow it out, it is not worth conserving. Jesus says, It is only smoldering, but there is the more reason why I should blow it into a flame. Satan says, *That* is only a bruised reed, trample it beneath thy feet; Jesus says, Because it is so bruised, it needs very special tenderness, care, and skill, to make anything of it: let Me have it. Satan says, *That* is only a charred brand plucked out of the fire, cast it back again, it will never be of any use; Jesus answers, It cost Me too much to pluck it out, and I am not going to cast it back again; besides, if there is only a little left of solid wood, it needs the more solicitude to preserve it, and use what there is.

Weakness, weariness, and sin, never fail to draw forth the deepest sympathy from the Lord Jesus. Nothing lays a stronger hold upon Him, or brings Him more swiftly to our side. At home our mother was always sweet, but sweetest when we were ill or weary. It almost tempted us to sham, so as to be more coaxed. And Christ's love is like mother's. You need not sham with Him, you are weak and broken enough. But those who are most bruised and struggling get the tenderest manifestations of his love. He resembles the strong man, with muscles like iron, and who stands like a rock, but who will bend in tears and tenderness over his cripple-child.

“It shall be

A Face like my face that receives thee, a Man like to me,

Thou shalt love and be loved by for ever; a Hand like this hand

Shall throw open the gates of new life to thee! See the Christ stand!”

Isaiah 43:1-2

“But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”

WHO is He that saith? — He that *created* thee in the womb of time; that has molded and *formed* thee in all the varying providences of life; that *redeemed* thee by His most precious blood; that knows and *calls* thee by thy name. When Prince Albert died, the Queen cried, in the agony of her grief, “There will be no one now to call me Victoria.” Ah, but there is always One who will call His own by name. Simon, Simon!

What doth He prognosticate? — He foretells that there will be fire through which the ore of character must be passed, and waters which the pilgrim host must traverse. This is inevitable. He is too transparently truthful to engage us without telling the nature of his service. Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom.

The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the world where sorrow is unknown,”

What doth He promise? — In all our lot, God is willing to be our partner and companion. He has called us into fellowship with His Son, and in His faithfulness He will see us through. The waters rise, the night is dark, the ford is hard to find, and footing is insecure; but He is at hand, steadying the feet, and keeping the head above the floods. The fiery furnace is heated sevenfold, so that the strongest soldiers in the armies of the world are consumed by its flame; but one like the Son of Man walks by His faithful witnesses, and makes the burning embers more delightful than the dewy sward of Paradise. The bonds will be burnt, and the captive limbs set free; but no hair of the head shall perish, nor the smell of fire pass on thee.

Isaiah 44:21

“Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for thou art my servant: I have formed thee; thou art my servant: O Israel, thou shalt not be forgotten of me.”

WE think He has forgotten. We lie on our bed of pain, and He sends no chariot to fetch us home. We linger to extreme old age, and are lonely because all the companions of our youth have left our side, and it seems as though He had forgotten to send the ferry-boat across for His child. And the river-brink is cold. We toil all through the night against wind and wave, and it seems inexplicable that the Master tarries so long on the shore. We sit by our dead; and though we sent for Him four days ago, He has not come. We told Him that we had come to our last crust; but as yet no raven has brought us food.

When I was a very little boy, one stormy night, my father, who usually fetched me when the weather was bad, forgot to call for me, and it grew later and later; all the other boys had been sent to bed, and I heard them proposing to send me, and I had never slept outside my father's house. I kept up as long as I could, and then my heart broke. It was only a momentary forgetting, however; for he came for me at last, through miles of storm — and love made amends. But not for a moment can God forget. He is never nearer than when He seems further. He has redeemed His blood, awaits its holy ministry of blotting out sin. He has tied tip His heart with us. We are graven upon the palms of His hands.

The dying thief asked to be remembered. And Jesus said in effect: “Remember thee! How could I ever forget thee, who alone couldst speak sustaining words of love and trust in these sad hours? Remember thee! Dost thou ask only to be remembered? I tell thee, when the shadows fall around the holy city, and all these crowds have gone to their homes, thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.”

Isaiah 45:9

“Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?”

GOD moulds us as a potter does his clay. In doing this, He comes to a point where our nature seems entrenched in all its might. We can yield everything but this. But not to yield this is to neutralize our yielding in all beside. That is where the soul strives with God. It is the battlefield, the crisis, the crease-line of destiny.

We may strive with God in two ways, saying, What makest Thou? or, He hath no hands; either by accusing Him of not having a definite purpose, or by alleging that He is not taking the best method of accomplishing it. Have you ever questioned the love, or wisdom, or purpose of God, in the molding and education of your soul? Or have you questioned the benevolence and wisdom of His methods? To do either of these is disastrous to peace of heart and growth in grace. We must will and dare to believe that God is doing His very best for us, and doing it in the very best way.

The fate of those who strive against their Maker is very terrible.

They are counted as potsherds. “Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth.” What is a potsherd? A shred of pottery, which may have been part of a beautiful vase, but now as a broken fragment is good for nothing but the rubbish-heap. See it protruding from the cinders! This is the fate of the castaway, which the apostle feared. The image says nothing as to our eternal destiny, but assures us that we may miss all opportunity of serving the purposes of God. Agree, therefore, with thy Divine Adversary quickly, lest He cast thee aside, or touch thee in the sinew of the thigh that shrinks, and thou limp through the remainder of thy days.

Isaiah 46:4

“And even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you: I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.”

WE must not press these words unduly, because we have doubtless warped our original constitution by habits of sin and selfishness, for which we are largely responsible. In these we may look to God for deliverance, but we cannot hold Him responsible.

But there are other attitudes of character and circumstances of life which are the direct result of God’s appointment. He allowed us to be born with such a temperament, of such parents, and in such a home. He knew exactly what was to be the climate and color of the land of our birth. He permitted us to begin our life-race with certain infirmities and disabilities, which have been apparently a great hindrance to our success. He has allowed us to enter a business, or become united in the marriage tie, which seems entirely hostile to our best interests. But all this should only cast us the more upon Him. “He will bear,” as He hath borne, our griefs and our sorrows. It is when we touch the lowest depth of our trouble that we most clearly hear Him say, *Child, my grace is sufficient for thee; thy weakness is that which the more calls forth my strength; I will turn it for my glory through thy life.*

By His grace He bears and upholds us in the circumstances in which He has placed us; and more than this, He bears in patience and love what our willfulness puts upon Him. He bare our sins in His own body on the tree; and now He bears with our murmurings, petulance and rebellion.

O God, Thou hast made us, and not we ourselves; we are thy people and the sheep of thy pasture; still bear with our wanderings and sins, we entreat Thee, till Thou hast made us what we would be, and made us meet for thy use.

Isaiah 47:1

“Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon, sit on the ground: there is no throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for thou shalt no more be called tender and delicate.”

ALL through the history of the chosen people there has been a great antagonist. In the days of the sons of Noah, Babel; in the days of the kingdom, Babylon; in opposition to the Church, Babylon the Great. And deeper than any earthly embodiment, always the spirit of the world, which exalteth itself, and setteth itself against God. Babylon was used by God to execute His purposes on Israel; but she altogether mistook the situation, and attributed her success to her prowess and the might of her arms. She acted with the utmost mercilessness and pride towards the nations of her time; and, therefore, when she had so far fulfilled the Divine purpose, her own judgment drew near.

Look at home! To colonize; to civilize heathen races; to make roadways across the ocean, along which the Gospel may travel; to link the whole world by the nerves of telegraph-wires; to give the Bible to every people under heaven — such has been the mission of the Anglo-Saxon race. But how much evil has mingled with it all! Think of the opium traffic, the sale of fire-water, the land-grabbing! Remember the impurity, the drunkenness, the godlessness, which have followed in the track of army and navy! Consider also the way in which our peoples are giving themselves up to pleasure-seeking and luxury, to Sabbath-breaking and irreligion, to spiritualism and so-called Christian science! And then ask whether there is not grave cause for apprehension. That Babylon should fall seemed utterly unlikely to the men of Isaiah's time; as unlikely as the fall of the Anglo-Saxon race. But it befell; and she who had sat delicately on the throne, was bidden to do the menial work of a slave.

Isaiah 48:11

“For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it: for how should my name be polluted? and I will not give my glory unto another.”

GOD finds His supreme motive in Himself. Mark how strongly He insists on it. “For my Name’s sake will I defer mine anger; and for my praise will I refrain from thee.” And in this verse He twice repeats, “for mine own sake.” Surely this is a matter for extreme comfort and congratulation.

If God had saved us because of some trait of natural beauty and attractiveness which He beheld in us, He might turn from us when it faded before the touch of years, or the change of our inward temper. The woman whose only claim on attention and homage is in her face — who has no other qualities to command and retain respect, must often dread the inevitable effect of time. It would be therefore a cause of perpetual unrest to us if God’s motive were only one of pity or complacency.

But God’s motive is His character, His name and nature, the maintenance of His honor in the face of the universe. In the face of the universe of intelligent beings He is too deeply implicated in our salvation to show signs of variableness or the shadow of turning. He did not begin to save us because we were worthy or lovely, but because He would; and therefore He will not give up because we prove ourselves weak and worthless and difficult to save. There are times with us all when we can but cast ourselves on His infinite grace and say, “Save me for thine own Name’s sake.” And when we have been overcome by sin, it is good to go to Him and say, “Father, I have nothing to plead but thy own nature and name declared in Jesus: for His sake, because Thou hast made a promise to Him, and to me in Him; for thy glory’s sake defer thine anger, forgive my sins; save me for thine own Name’s sake.”

Isaiah 49:2

“And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me;”

THESE words were addressed to Israel, and must be applied to Him who alone has expressed the true genius and spirit of the Hebrew people, that Prince of the House of David whom we call Master and Lord. And in so far as we belong to and resemble Him, we may claim that God should make these words true of us.

The mouth, like the sharp sword, recalls the portrait of the Son of Man, out of whose mouth a sharp two-edged sword proceeded. We may well ask that our words should partake of the nature of the Word of God, which is quick and powerful, and sharper than a two-edged sword (Revelation 1:16).

Hidden in the shadow of God's hand is a safe and strong position for the Christian worker. We all need more of the shadow, and we need not fear it when it is cast by His hand. Our life must be hidden with Christ in God, if we shall come forth largely to influence men. Do not be afraid of the shadow, Christian worker.

The polished shaft is one which is free from rust. Nothing removes rust like friction, whether by the file or sand-paper. We have often to submit to the chafe of tiny irritants in order to keep us polished.

In his quiver hath He hid me. — Always ready for use, within reach of God's hand, waiting to be adjusted to the bowstring, and launched through the air to some joint in the harness; such should be our attitude. But again it is impressed upon us that we must be hidden through long periods of cessation from active use, content with the darkness of the quiver until the moment of our mission has arrived. Then forward, with the might of God's hand thrilling through our souls.

Isaiah 50:4

“The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned.”

THIS is a beautiful image. Morning by morning the Lord God draws near His chosen servant and awakens him, calling him by name, giving him some sweet message, and preparing him for the day’s errands, duties, and sufferings.

The tongue of the learner. — The sense of the original is somewhat obscured by the use of the word “learned.” It should be “disciple”: one that learns through being taught. We must be disciples before we can be apostles, and be taught before we teach. We shall never do our best work for God until we accustom ourselves to receive and take His messages; and there is no such time as the early morning for the lowly posture of sitting at the Master’s feet to hear His word.

To him that is weary. — Notice that God’s messengers are sent to the weary. There are so many of these in the world that special provision must be made for their sustaining and comfort. God needs a great company of Barnabas’s sons of consolation, who having been comforted shall know how to comfort others. No kind of ministry needs such careful preparation as that exercised towards the weary and heavy-laden. To learn how to do this involves some months of lonely suffering.

Wakened to hear. — In softest whispers God draws nigh, uncovering the ear, putting back the locks that might intercept His gentlest accent. Only let us see to it that we are not rebellious, or turn away back. Let not the lowliness of the work, the weary mind, the worry about tiny questions, put us off from this sacred enterprise. And let us not be dissuaded by those who would smite, and pluck out the hair. Neither pride nor fear may deter from this sacred work.

Isaiah 51:12

“I, even I, am he that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass;”

IT is related that in the great Indian Mutiny, when some hundreds of English ladies with their children were shut up in the Residency at Lucknow, and threatened by an immense crowd of rebels, a leaf of the Bible, stained with blood, and used as a common piece of wrapping, was brought in to them, and proved to contain these words. It reminded them of God their Maker; and bade them fear no more the fury of the oppressor, or the failure of bread, because the Lord God was at hand to neutralize the tumult and fury of their foes.

In the Lord our Maker we have the only antidote for alarm and sorrow. At this time the cross had not been erected with its precious revelation of the love of God; and the prophet quotes two of the greatest proofs of God’s might — the miracle of Creation, with its over-arching heavens and deep-laid foundations of the earth; and that of the deliverance from Egypt.

Go out into nature, behold the might of God written on His glorious works, and then say to yourself, This God is my Father; and He would rather sacrifice worlds of matter, than forget or forsake His child. It were easier for Him to destroy all that He has made, and re-create it in a moment of time, than allow one of His weakest children that trusts in Him to be overwhelmed by trouble. Then go forth and stand at the cross, and remember that it was for thee. Surely He who went to so great expenditure to purchase thee from the power of hell, will not let thee perish before the malice of man. Furious men are but the foam of the breaker which your Deliverer will put aside. The sea may roar, but it cannot overwhelm.

Isaiah 52:11

“Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence, touch no unclean thing; go ye out of the midst of her; be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD.”

THE chosen people are at the end of the seventy years' captivity; the time of their deliverance from Babylon has arrived. Their Almighty Deliverer, throwing back the loose sleeve of His robe, to leave His arm free, makes ready for an unusual exercise of power. There will be no need of haste as when the people fled at night from Egypt. They may not go out with haste, nor go by flight; for their Divine Leader would precede them, and his escort would be their rearguard.

This is the summons to us all who may have been in captivity to Babylon in any form. We are to arise and depart, shaking loose the bonds of our captivity. Let us follow the cloudy pillar of God's presence guiding us continually, and let us not be always looking behind, as though dreading the recurrence of past sins and mistakes. They shall not pursue those whom God has delivered; or, if they do, they shall not overtake. It is an unspeakable comfort to those who have sinned to know that the old temptations and forms of bondage are intercepted by the presence of the Eternal God, just as His cloud intercepted Pharaoh's host.

The one matter about which we must be scrupulously careful is our cleanliness. Of old, Cyrus entrusted Ezra with the holy vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple. Their custodians needed to be holy. We, too, have to bear the sacred trust of God's holy Name and Gospel. His day, His Book, the doctrines of evangelical truth, His honor, are among the vessels which we are to carry through the world. We, too, must be holy, cleansing ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; coming out, and not touching the unclean thing.

Isaiah 53:6

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

THE Lord did it, because He was the Lord, and He took on Himself the iniquity of us all. “Made to meet” is the marginal reading; as though many confluent streams poured their black substances into one foaming maelstrom which filled the heart of the dying Savior. Well may the apostle Peter recapitulate His work in the matchless, almost monosyllabic sentence, “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” (1 Peter 2:24)

This verse begins and ends with *all*. We are all alike in having “gone astray.” We have not all gone in the same direction, nor all to the same extent. We are not equally far from the fold. But we are all away from it. They say that if sheep can stray, they will; and there is no kind of animal more hopeless and helpless than sheep which have got out of the pen. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass its master’s crib; the dog and cat will make their way home, but the sheep wanders on in small and ever smaller companies, until it is entrapped in the rocks, or devoured by wolves, or harried to death by dogs. Such were we. Panting, driven, chased, weary; but Jesus sought us, and brought us back to the fold, and gave us a name and place among his own. We are returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls.

But ah, how can we forget the cost we have been to the Shepherd! See ye not the wounds in His hands and feet? Know ye not that His heart was lacerated and broken by the burden of our sins? “Our own way,” that has been the curse of our lives, and the agony of our Shepherd. Would that it might be for ever blocked against us, and that we might be led in His own way for His Name’s sake!

Isaiah 54:11

“O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.”

FROM His standpoint of vision on the hilltops of glory, He sees the tossings of thy craft. Every billow, every lurch, every rebuff, is discerned and felt by Him. He, too, has sailed through stormy seas, and is acquainted with grief. Not comforted by man, thou shalt be consoled by the Divine Comforter. Cast out by thy lovers, thou shalt be gathered to the bosom of God. When the man born blind was cast out of the synagogue, Jesus found him; and He will find thee.

Deep down in the tossing waves, He will lay thy foundations in fair colors, and will spare no stones, however precious, in the elaboration of thy character. Sapphires, rubies, and carbuncles are very resplendent and beautiful, but they are all the children of fire. You cannot have them unless you are prepared to pay the cost in blood and tears. These jewels are produced of very ordinary ingredients, which have been subjected to tremendous pressure and terrific heat. When next your heart misgives you amid your fiery trials, remember that God is at work making the rubies and carbuncles of your eternal array. You will be well compensated.

There are destructive agencies around us on all hands — the smith with his coals; the waster with his scythe; the destroyer with his weapon — but they are all beneath the mighty hand of God. They cannot overstep the limits He assigns. When a man’s ways please the Lord, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him. He restrains the wrath of his foes, and surrounds him with a munition of rocks.

The blessings of this chapter are not for the Jews only, but for all the servants of the Lord. It is expressly stated that this is their heritage (Isaiah 54:17).

Isaiah 55:13

“Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the briar shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

HERE are the substitutions of grace. It would have been much to root up the thorn, and to cut up the briar, so that the soil should be rid of weeds; but God does more. He substitutes fir-trees for thorns, and myrtles for briars; and He does this for His Name’s sake, and as a sign for evermore.

He will do this in your character. — There are thorns and briars there; you must confess it to your cost. Now, do not be satisfied with their extermination, but seek that God should substitute their opposites; so that the site of some old evil maybe commemorated by the growth of some fair grace. Where the thorn of cynicism and sarcasm grew, there the graceful and sprightly fir of forbearance; where the briar of malice and envy, there the sensitive delicate myrtle of charity. This is the triumph of grace in the believer’s heart.

He will do this in your home. — You have a thorn in that husband, or a briar in that child. Once you used to look for relief in death. You almost questioned whether you might not hasten yourself out of such terrible and perpetual suffering. It seemed as though you were being scourged with thorns. But God will do much better than this. He is able to transform those trying dispositions. That husband will become your evergreen fir-tree: that child your myrtle.

He will do this in your trials. — There are briars besetting every path that call for earnest care. Many beside Paul have thorns in the flesh. But His grace is sufficient to change our biggest curse into our greatest blessing. Look for this. Ask God to transform the conditions of your life which have cost you excruciating anguish, into sources of benediction.

Isaiah 56:7

“Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people.”

WHO are these favored souls? Ah, it is a miracle of grace and comfort to find that they were once, like ourselves, Gentiles after the flesh, separate from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, dug from the same hole of the pit to which we have belonged! And if they were lifted to such holy nearness to God — if this be indeed a true picture of God’s dealings with Gentiles, then let us take heart, and ask that not one of these good things should fail in our own experience.

But mark the conditions, as detailed in Isaiah 56:6. We must be joined to the Lord in an indissoluble covenant; we must minister to Him in daily holy service as His priests; we must love His Name; we must diligently serve Him; we must abide in the Sabbath-keeping of the inner rest of the heart; and we must hold fast by His covenant. These are indispensable conditions to test the caliber and quality of the souls who are admitted to His inner presence. You must conform to them if you would be among those whom God brings in.

To what does God call such souls? To mountains of vision, whence they look out on eternal landscapes, and stand above the taint of this world, its smoke and dust. To joy: He makes them joyful in His house of prayer, for all true prayer has in it the seeds of everlasting joy. To that acceptance which fills the soul with calm and hallowed delight. Such things are within our reach; not too great or high for our feet to attain, because God will bring us in. He gathereth the outcasts; He collects His flock when straying, and leads them up to the dewy pastures of the mountain lawns.

Isaiah 57:19

“I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the LORD; and I will heal him.”

OUR words should be like fruit. Fruit is the final cause and reason of a tree’s culture; and is it not to bear fruit that we have been redeemed and cultivated with infinite solicitude? Fruit reveals the nature of its parent tree; and is there anything that more quickly shows what we are than our talk? “By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.” (Matthew 12:37) Fruit, when it is ripe, is sweet to the taste; but beneath these luscious qualities there is always the ultimate design of securing the propagation of the tree through its seed; so beneath the wit, or laughter, or strong common-sense of our words, there should be the aim of sowing in others the words of eternal life.

How often, when we get into conversation with comparative strangers or our friends, we are at a loss to turn it into the right channels. Then, let us lift our thoughts to God, and say, Create in me now the right word, which shall refresh and help those whom I address. The answer will always be one of peace. “Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near.” Let our lips ever ring with the silver notes of PEACE, *Peace*; PEACE, *Peace*.

Still more in prayer we may claim that God should create the petitions which our lips offer. You feel that you cannot pray as you would. Now, put away the straining and striving which have robbed your quiet times of their blessedness. Kneel before God in the utter stillness of your spirit, and ask Him to create supplications, intercessions, and worship, on your lips. Dare to believe that He is doing this, and be assured that the most broken utterances, which He has created and given, are sweeter to Him than the most ornate ritual.

Isaiah 58:11

“And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.”

THESE are only a handful of the cluster of promises with which this chapter abounds. Let us ponder them; they are full of comfort. To be guided continually; to be satisfied when all the world around is athirst; to be fair and attractive to those who see us from day to day; to be as fountains of comfort and joy to the dry and weary land in which we are called to live — are not such blessings good to seek and keep? But there are certain conditions that must be fulfilled. Before we break the seal and appropriate the money within, we must be sure that our name is on the envelope, and that we are intended by the designation.

First, we must undo. If we have injured others by word or act, or if we are still doing so, we must retrace our steps, and so far as possible undo the wrong (Isaiah 58:6).

Next, we must remember the Lord’s words in Matthew 25, and be willing to minister deeds of helpful sympathy to the bodies and souls of men, as though we were doing them to Him (Isaiah 58:7).

Lastly, we must ever remember to maintain within our hearts the spirit of Sabbath calm and peace. Not fussy, nor anxious, nor fretful and impetuous; but refraining our foot from our own paths and our hand from our own devices; refusing to find our own pleasure, and do our own works. It is only when we are fully resolved to act thus, allowing God to originate all our plans, and to work in us for their accomplishment, that we enter on our heritage of blessedness, or are brought into the enjoyment of the continual guidance and blessing of which we have spoken. *Then* God will delight in us, and we in Him.

Isaiah 59:21

“As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the LORD; My spirit that is upon thee, and my words which I have put in thy mouth, shall not depart out of thy mouth, nor out of the mouth of thy seed, nor out of the mouth of thy seed’s seed, saith the LORD, from henceforth and for ever.”

THIS is a very precious promise, especially to God’s ministers and to all who are using their voice and lips in His holy service. These may claim its fulfillment up to the hilt; and it is no doubt due to some pious ancestor having claimed these words that there is so often a godly succession of ministers in one family bearing the same honored name.

But these words are often quoted promiscuously and carelessly. Notice there are two traits of character distinctly noted and specified.

We must receive the Holy Spirit, and we must utter the words which He puts into our lips. They are one, because when the Holy Spirit fills the soul the lips are touched as with a live coal from off the altar. “They were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak ...” (Acts 2:4) Oh, bend your head low beneath the anointing of the great High Priest. Let Him breathe on you, and say, *Receive the Holy Spirit*; and then go out to be a witness for Him. Thou shalt be taught in the same hour what and how.

It is a marvelous thing that God should enter into covenant with man to keep on blessing His seed for His Word’s sake. Yet He does so. He keeps His blessings for thousands of them that love Him and keep His commandments, whilst He punishes only to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him. Long after you have gone, if only you have earnestly done God’s work in the world, He will be gracious to your children and your children’s children. Not only, as the poet said, “in a dead man’s face” comes out the likeness to one of his ancestors, but in the faces and lives of living men we may trace the influence of their godly forefathers.

Isaiah 60:1

“Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee.”

FOR long the night had brooded on Mount Zion, and the beautiful city had sat in the dust desolate and afflicted; but at last the watchers see the sky brightening into the splendor of dawn, and the cry goes forth that the day is at hand, calling her to arise and shine.

Whenever the glory of the Lord rises upon thee, be sure to reflect it. Arise, shine! Arise, to catch as much of it as possible. Shine, that others may catch as much as possible also. Behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord, in long and loving fellowship, till you reflect it in full-orbed glory; and as you reflect it you will be changed into the same image from glory to glory, by the Lord the Spirit. Arise to the highest pinnacle of the mountain to catch the dawn, and then begin to shine with a glory that never shone on sea or shore.

Sometimes Christians seek release from their positions in business or social life, on the plea that they are so uncongenial and ungodly. Yet these are the very circumstances under which Zion is bidden to arise and shine. The darker the staircase, the more need of the candle. Because darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people, there is the more need for her towers to gleam with light. The Lord has given us the light of His countenance that we may flash it forward. In loneliness and solitude let us still shine for Jesus, like the stone-white steeple of a church, smitten by a searchlight in the night.

“Yet not in solitude! if Christ anear me
Waketh Him workers for the great employ!
Oh, not in solitude! — if souls that hear me
Catch from my joyance the surprise of joy.”

Isaiah 61:1

“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;”

WE can never disassociate those words from that memorable scene at the Jordan, when, after the Lord’s baptism, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit, like a dove, rested upon Him. Forty days of fierce temptation could not deprive Him of that holy anointing; and He came to Galilee, stood up in the synagogue of Nazareth, and announced the anointing He had received.

If the Master needed it, how much more do we! If He did not attempt to bind up the broken-hearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, or the opening of the prison to the bound; if He would not preach, or comfort, or communicate joy, until that memorable unction had been imparted — how absurd it is for us to attempt similar works without this anointing!

What a marvelous forecast is here of the mission of Christ through his Church to the world during the present age. She is sent to take up and pass on this blessed ministry. What a true forecast also of the needs of mankind! It is as though the Holy Spirit desired to reveal the salient characteristics of the great sad world, that it would be full of the broken-hearted, of captives, prisoners, and mourners, needing Divine assistance and ministrations. Man is so fallen and helpless that he needs the entire Trinity: *The Lord God*, the Father; *Me*, the Son; and *The Spirit*, the Holy Ghost.

When Jesus quoted these words He stopped at the comma in the second verse, which stood therefore for at least nineteen hundred years which intervene between the proclamation of the year of mercy and of the day of vengeance. The time for repentance is lengthening out, since God desires not the sinner’s death, but that he should turn and live.

Isaiah 62:1

“For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.”

WE have here the *unresting Christ*. Day and night He pleads for the city that crucified Him; and it is in answer to His supplications that she will one day arise from her ruins. Is it not also true that He ever lives to intercede for us, praying when we are silent, watching when we sleep? His prayer rises for His people night and day. Perhaps they would not pray for themselves, if His intercessions did not incite. Certainly His sifted Simons would drift beyond hope, if He did not pray for them. Every sinner has been prayed for to the end of time by Him who said, “Father, forgive;” and every saint, by Him who promised to pray to the Father that He would give another Comforter, the Holy Ghost. The prayers of Jesus hover over the world like the dove over the weltering chaos of creation.

Next we have the *unresting watchmen* (Isaiah 62:6). Christ’s intercession must be supplemented by ours — whether for the restoration of the Jews, or the up-building of the Church, or the salvation of individuals. There must be oneness of prayer between the Intercessor before the Throne, and His remembrancers on earth; and there will be, if the Holy Ghost is allowed to exercise His chosen ministry of making intercession with us on behalf of the saints according to the will of God.

Lastly, there is the *unresting God* (Isaiah 62:7). He, too, has no rest. The rest of God is crowded with thought and care for His own. The image of Buddha presents the conception of an impassive deity whose one aim is to rid himself of all that might trouble his repose. In our God, on the other hand, together with the perfect serenity and satisfaction of His nature, there are the eternal tides of desire and gracious help.

Isaiah 63:14

“As a beast goeth down into the valley, the Spirit of the LORD caused him to rest: so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.”

IT is the noonday glare in Palestine. The sun's rays like spears of flame are striking down upon the parched sand-wastes, and all the land burns like a furnace. Away yonder is a sequestered glen, where mosses line the margins of streamlets and pools, and rich pasture keeps green in the shadow of the hills. Thither the cattle descend at noon. As the shadows creep down the mountain-sides they follow them, and presently the herd browses on the succulent herbage or reclines beneath the shadows of the spreading trees, while the brooks purl past clear and cool. Similarly Isaiah says God brought His people through the wilderness, leading them as a horse that might not stumble, and finally conducted them into the rest of Canaan.

But how fit an emblem is suggested of our Father's dealings with us. The scorching sun of temptation shines around us. The glare of publicity, the fever of money-making, the strife of tongues, torment the children of men. But for God's beloved ones there is a secret place by Him, a green and verdant nook, watered by the river of God. Over its portals these words are written: "I will give you rest."

When once we learn to trust our Father's unfailing love, we are *caused* to rest. Notice that forcible expression: the Spirit of the Lord caused them to rest. Here is anew thought of the omnipotence of love. It can so reveal itself that it almost compels rest. Cause us to lie down, O Lord, we pray Thee! Job speaks of Him as *giving* quietness: and then who can make trouble? Seek quietness as His gift! Lo! there is a place by Him, in the mountain-shadowed valley of His care, where disquieted souls are at peace. Seek it!

Isaiah 64:5

“Thou meetest him that rejoiceth and worketh righteousness, those that remember thee in thy ways: behold, thou art wroth; for we have sinned: in those is continuance, and we shall be saved.”

EVEN when visiting judgment upon the unrighteous, God remembers mercy for His people. He meets them as daily Helper and as eternal Savior. But He always comes towards them down one pathway; and if we would encounter Him, we must tread it. It is the path of waiting expectancy (Isaiah 64:4); of rejoicing obedience; of holy remembrance. In these paths He meets us most graciously, working for us, and revealing things which from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, nor seen.

This meeting of His servants has ever been one of the ways of God. It was His daily habit to meet Adam in the dewy glades of Paradise, and talk with him. As Melchizedek of old met Abraham after a great conflict, so Christ comes upon His people after many a hard duty and severe contest with evil, and ministers heavenly refreshment. As He met Mary at the sepulchre, and Peter in the garden, and the two that walked to Emmaus, and the disciples in the grey dawn by the lake, so He meets us still.

To be thus met by God is a glad Christian experience. At morning prayer it gives strength and joy for the entire day; at eventide it is an inestimable consolation and encouragement. Often Christ will encounter us when treading some lowly path of daily duty, and ever we are aware, we shall be called up into His chariot. Those whom He meets He will accompany in the way; those whom He accompanies He will succour and sustain.

It is very consoling to be told that in these ways of our dear Lord there is continuance (Isaiah 64:5). He is not spasmodic nor changeable. On and on for evermore, without the shadow of turning He will meet and bless us.

Isaiah 65:17

“For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.”

THE heavens and earth that are now were not produced in their present shape in a day; but through long periods, which are chronicled in the strata of the earth, God was at work building them up. So beneath the scaffolding of history and human affairs it may be that the Creator is already at work laying the foundations of the new era which shall soon be unveiled. But the creation of the new is much more difficult than of the old, because there is so much undoing to be done. Amid the crash of empire, the rock of revolutions, the blood, and tears, and anguish of the present, God is making room for and preparing the new heavens and earth in which dwelleth righteousness.

Just think of these exquisite words! — “Never remembered, nor come to mind!” Our bitter sorrows transmuted into such exquisite blessedness that for very joy of heart we shall have no room for remembering what seemed once intolerable. We shall not recall the nights of pain, the years of enforced inactivity, the failures, the partings, the bereavements. The betrothed will forget the long years of waiting. We turn to the Book of Revelation for further particulars, and there learn that the blessed future can only be explained in negatives. What heaven will really be is as yet hidden, that the surprise may be the greater; but it is certain that each of the elements of present distress will be eliminated. No more sorrow, pain, death, curse, tears, or separating sea. Christ will make, is making, all things new; and, best of all, He is making us new to enjoy them.

Oh, blessed condition, in which God will not remember our sins, and we shall not remember the former things, of pain, and sorrow, and death!

INFORMATION ON THE SCRIPTURE TEXTS USED IN THIS DEVOTIONAL

PROVERBS: Book of Wisdom

Writer: Mostly Solomon

Key Passage:

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7)

Remarks: Proverbs are short sayings about conduct and character, primarily in the spiritual, moral and social realms. They form a library of instruction on how to live a godly life here on earth.

Outline:

1. The Value of Wisdom (1-9)
2. The Applications of Wisdom (10-31)

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ECCLESIASTES: The Vanity of Life without God

Writer: Solomon

Key Passages:

“I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” Ecclesiastes 1:14;

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” Ecclesiastes 12:13

Remarks: It investigates life and tells what kind of life is worth living. It is the quest of a soul who sees only vanity all about him until his eyes are opened to the hope offered by God.

Outline:

1. The Vanity of Life under the Sun (1-10)
2. The Hope of Life beyond the Sun (11-12)

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SONG OF SOLOMON: Book of Love

Writer: Solomon

Key Passage:

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned.” Song of Solomon 8:7

Remarks: It is a dialogue song which portrays the love story of Solomon with a Shulamite woman.

Outline:

1. The Excitement of Courtship (1-2)
2. The Joy of Marriage (3-4)
3. The Anguish of Being Apart (5)
4. The Blessedness of Love in Marriage (6-8)

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ISAIAH: God’s Justice and God’s Grace

Writer: Isaiah

Key Passage:

“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:6

Remarks: Isaiah prophesied of God's justice in bringing judgment on Judah through the coming Babylonian Captivity, and also about God's grace on Judah through the Return that would follow.

Outline:

1. Prophetic Condemnation (1-35)
2. Historic Contribution (36-39)
3. Prophetic Consolation (40-66)

Scripture Memory Programme 2010

Living For Jesus

To live for Jesus is to be aflame with love for Him, to build our family relationships on Him, to have a passion for godliness, and to handle our daily issues of life with His wisdom. August you experience the blessedness of a Christ-filled life as you memorise and meditate on the passages of Scripture found below.

July 4 & 11 – Obedience to God

Psalm 119:1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD.

July 18 & 25 – Sanctification

2 Peter 1:3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.

August 1 & 8 – Obedience to Authority

Romans 13:1 Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

August 15 & 22 – Sanctification

Titus 2:11-12 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

August 29 – Salvation

Ezekiel 18:32 For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

September 5 & 12 – Wisdom for Living

Ephesians 5:15-16 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

September 19 & 26 – Humility

Psalm 34:18 The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

October 3 & 10 – Marriage

Genesis 2:24 Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

October 17 & 24 – Sins of the Heart

Matthew 5:28 But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.

October 31 – Salvation

2 Peter 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

November 7 & 14 – Spiritual Vigilance

1 Peter 5:8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he August devour.

November 21 & 28 – Acquisition of Wealth

Proverbs 13:11 Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.

December 5 & 12 – Wonderfully Made

Psalms 139:14 I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well.

December 19 & 26 – End of the World

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.