

SEASONS
OF
COMFORT

LOGOS PUBLICATIONS
Box 220, Findon,
South Australia 5023

Reprint - 1999

SEASONS OF COMFORT

AT THE

TABLE OF THE LORD

BEING

ADDRESSES

AT THE BREAKING OF BREAD, ON

SUNDAY MORNING AT BIRMINGHAM

(PRINCIPALLY)

By **ROBERT ROBERTS**

VOLUME ONE



2—THE FIRST EDITOR

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

The following addresses pre-suppose acquaintance with the things revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as distinguished from the established theology of the day. Without this acquaintance the addresses will be, in many points, unintelligible. They were delivered to those who have discarded the travesties and caricatures of Bible truth exhibited in the faiths, forms, and practices of nearly all sects and denominations of Christendom, and who have heartily embraced the faith apostolically delivered in the first century, as summarized in the apostolic phrase: "The things concerning the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 8:12). Consequently, they are not demonstrative or polemic. They take a certain system of faith for granted, and seek to apply the principles of that system in a practical personal manner, in the spirit of the precept which says: "Exhort one another daily" (Heb. 3:13). They are calculated to build up and strengthen in the profession of the faith, rather than to convince and lead to the reception of that faith. Still, many things affirmed will be found proved and illustrated, so that the book will not be unprofitable reading for those who are not yet prepared to believe that the doctrines of the orthodox world are opposed to the teachings of the Scriptures. If such should desire a further opportunity of examining the convictions which underlie these addresses, they may do so by consulting the various works published by the Christadelphians, some of which are advertised herewith. For those who had already come to the conclusion referred to, the book may be of some service in the weary turmoil of the present evil world. It will help them to realize their position, and to renew their diligence, and to rouse drooping hearts in the prospect of the fulfilment of God's great purpose in Christ. The testimony of many is that this result has already and largely been produced in past times. The delivery of the addresses has been declared to be productive of "Seasons of Comfort"; and similar testimony has been borne by hundreds to the reading of them in *The Christadelphian*, in which they originally appeared.

There are just fifty-two addresses — one for each Sunday in the year. They were not delivered consecutively, or in one year, or in any particular order, nor exactly as they are now published. They are mostly reproductions by the author from memory, after their extempore delivery. In some cases they are from notes by shorthand writers, revised by the speaker.

THE AUTHOR.

64, Belgrave Road,
Birmingham, 31st October, 1879.

PREFACE TO THIS EDITION

Since the original volume of *Seasons of Comfort* was presented to the Brotherhood, three further editions have been produced, the last of which was over a generation ago, in 1944. Attitudes and circumstances have greatly changed with the passing years, and the determination and firmness of the pioneering days have merged into the tolerance and laxity of the present. Life has brought great pressures, and it is not always easy to reserve quiet moments for meditation and contemplation of spiritual matters. Nevertheless, there is still “a people prepared for the coming of the Lord,” though they be few in number and scattered wide in area. They can still profit from the thoughtful writings of Brother Roberts, and therefore we are pleased to put this volume into the hands of the reader.

Seasons of Comfort was followed by *Further Seasons of Comfort*, published in 1885, in which another 52 exhortations were provided. Both volumes are incorporated herein, so that instead of being used primarily as a basis for Sunday Morning Memorial Meetings as was the original intention, the words of Brother Roberts are recommended for personal meditation and for building faith and conviction. In times of stress, *Seasons of Comfort* can become a soothing and meditative relaxation. When faced with trouble, they can be used to project mind and heart to the relief that will come with the appearance of the Lord. In all circumstances of life, this volume can become an enjoyable and encouraging companion, providing thoughtful reading and spiritually-enlivening principles.

Such sound expositions, based upon a clear understanding of the Truth and its proper interpretation into the matters of daily living, are extremely important today. We hope that the reader will receive much encouragement therefrom, and allow the wisdom of the Word to permeate heart and mind, so that the Seasons of Comfort will be a constant companion until He come, who is the true comfort of life.

G. E. Mansfield, 1989.

CONTENTS

Preface	5
Comfort	9
The Breaking of Bread	14
Reproach	18
Refreshment	23
God "A Sun and Shield"	28
The Other Side of God's Character	35
Obedience	40
Consolation	45
Letter to Philemon	50
Christ Past and Future	54
The Greatness of Christ	59
God's Work on Earth	63
Strangers and Sojourners	69
The Unsearchable Riches of Christ	74
The Character of God	79
The Reading of the Scriptures	83
Waiting for Christ	88
Spiritual Ignorance and Woman's Position	92
Sober Reflection	97
Masters and Servants	102
Remembrance	107
Nearer the Crisis	111
The Only Hope	116
Unprofitable Questions	120
Love and Doctrine	124
Submission to Human Law	128
The Gifts of the Spirit	132
Holiness	137
Receiving The Grace of God in Vain	142
The Day of the Lord	146
Light and Darkness	152
Present Suffering	157
Christ and the Prophets	165
Christ and Nature	171
The Wedding Garment	176
Salt	180
Danger	184
Signs and Traditions	189
Walking Worthily	193
The Prosperity of the Wicked	198
The Word Enduring for Ever	204
The World	210
Enmity of Classes	216
The Blessedness of Knowing the Truth	221
Crotchets	226
Griefs	232
A Warning Message	236
The Beauty of Christ	240
The Psalms	245
The Proverbs	251
The Temptation of Christ	257
Christ's "Sermon on the Mount"	264

The Man of Sorrow	273
Altogether Vanity	279
The Reign of Law	285
The Household of Faith	291
Patience and Its Work	294
The Dead in Christ	298
An Oracle of Wrath	305
Looking for Great Things	310
The Logic of the Stars	317
Remembering Christ Acceptably	322
The Power of the Scriptures	328
“As a Thief in the Night”	334
The World Asleep	340
Signs of the Morning	346
The Flesh and the Spirit	351
The Fellow-Heirship of the Gentiles	356
Paul as a Christ-Appointed Model	363
Paul and True Godliness	370
The Example of Israel’s History	375
Praise and Heart-Hardening	381
Wisdom Different from Science or Philosophy	387
Judgment and Salvation	393
The Hope of Israel	400
God and the Bible	407
Baruch and God’s Message	412
Four Prominent Personages	416
The Hope and its Strong Foundations	422
The Olive Trees and the Candlestick	426
The Marriage Supper of the Lamb	432
Bible Wisdom Versus Philosophic Morality	438
In Collision with Society	443
The Reality of God in History	449
Appearances and Realities — Husbands and Wives	454
Paul’s Sorrow About Israel	460
Election Versus Calvinism	466
God’s Object in Restoring Israel	472
Daniel at Babylon	480
Miracle and Prophecy	488
Christ Our Passover	495
“Until he Come”	501
The Cup of Blessing	508
The Sure Foundation	514
The Truth	521
Self-Examination	526
The Rechabites	533
Right Views of Life	539
The Lesson of the Genealogies	546
The Brethren at Colosse	552
Wisdom	558
The Antidote to Spiritual Distemper	565
Why We Break Bread	572
Doing the Will of God — Comfort to the Faint-Hearted	578

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Comfort

The voice of comfort.—The need for it.—The modern dispersion of saints.—Strangers and not strangers.—Adoption in one direction producing alienation in another.—Difficulty of the situation.—The need for fortitude.—Self-denial.—Mr. Self a dangerous acquaintance.—Christ knocking at the door.—The price of the Kingdom.—Eye-service.—Christ's rule of selecting his friends.—God's "abundant mercy."—Crucifixion and resurrection.—The Father's love.—The goodness that will come of it.—Inferiority of the present state.—Glory of the coming state.—Reserved in heaven meanwhile.—Faith and Reason.—The glorious picture they jointly produce.

1 PETER 1.—Sometimes in reproof, sometimes in comfort : thus the Spirit speaks as need requires. Here, it is the voice of comfort ; the voice of the shepherd, Peter, as he executes the commission assigned to him in the parting words of the Chief Shepherd : " Feed my lambs." It is pleasant to hear such a voice. We need comfort. We are in a world of evil, in which are many hindrances. The Father is little thought of ; the Son largely forgotten ; and the children (such few as there are) despised. This makes the situation bleak enough for the lambs ; but there are other trials ; false brethren, wolves in sheep's clothing, biting " winds of doctrine," and poor weak failings in all of us that make us self-chidden and condemned. We need to be comforted, and the Lord commands it for such as are broken and contrite in heart, trembling at His word.

Peter addresses himself to " the strangers scattered." In Peter's day, they were scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, etc. Today they are scattered throughout England, Wales, Scotland, America, Australia, etc. ; and though differently situated in many respects, their spiritual needs are the same. They are strangers and not strangers. The truth has made them at home where they were strange, and strange where they were at home. They are no longer strangers and foreigners to the commonwealth of Israel with its all-glorious covenants of promise, with which in the days of their darkness they had no connection. They have received the adoption of sons and rejoice in being fellow-citizens with the Lord Jesus, with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets and saints of that splendid polity that will one day fill the world with light, and life, and love, and joy, and glory to God in the highest ; in this, they are at home where they were strange. But this has more of the future than the present in it. We rejoice in the hope, it is true ; but we walk by faith and not by sight, and this is burdensome to the natural man.

In the things that are seen, we have been turned just the other way about. We once belonged to the world, and the world loved its own, and we were at home in it, but now we are strangers and sojourners, as all the fathers were. We look not at the things which are seen. We await the day

SEASONS OF COMFORT

of the manifestation of the sons of God. In this attitude we need the exhortation of this chapter : "Gird up the loins of your mind ; be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Without the continual girding of the loins of the mind (in the continual adjustment of our mental relation to the things that are and shall be, in the unfailing study of the holy oracles) we shall grow weary and faint in our minds, and hope will die instead of continuing, and we ourselves become castaway on the great ocean. We must train ourselves to accept the position of strangers and sojourners. "*If ye call on the Father,*" says Peter : that is if ye really mean to be children of the Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man's work, "pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." Our salvation is not otherwise to be wrought out than in fear and trembling. There is no time for pleasure-hunting. The service of Christ is now, as it always has been, a course of self-denial. Analyse most men's hearts, and self-comfort, self-prosperity, self-honour, self-pleasure, in some form or other, will be found the directing motive. Christ is made to wait on Mr. Self's convenience. It is a dangerous policy ; for, without respect of persons, the Father, who judgeth every one's work, will shortly ask of the whole programme, "Did ye it for Me ?" Christ stands now at the door and knocks. If we open to him and take him in as our friend and counsellor, dwelling in our heart by faith, he will become Captain, and will direct the whole course of things for us, and enable us to render a good account in the day when the great question is put. But if we listen to other voices rather, and neglect the reading of the Word, giving heed only to the demands of business, the love of money, the claims of kindred, the wants of the flesh in houses, lands, clothes, eating, drinking, marriage, etc., Christ, after a while, turns away from the door, and the Christless house, joined to its idols, is given over, at last, to desolation. Christ means to bestow immortality and a kingdom, and, therefore, he asks a high price, even the whole heart and life. He is patient ; but he will not, in the day of his glory, accept the homage of an eye-servant. Many, no doubt, in that day, will prostrate themselves eagerly before him, and claim kinship, as he himself tells us ; but his favours will be reserved for those who faithfully serve him in his absence, declining association with a world that knew him not, taking part in the testimony of him which the world despises, and diligently observing his precepts, while all is untoward, self-crucifying, and silent. He will be to us what we are to him. In this he is like the Father, who to the pure shows Himself pure ; to the righteous shows Himself righteous (Psa. 18 : 25). Deny him, and he will deny us ; confess him, and he will confess us ; neglect him, and he will neglect us ; serve him, and he will gird himself and make us sit down to meat and come forth and serve us.

His great rule is, "He that doeth the will of my Father, the same is mine." Often did he enforce this rule when on earth. He comes soon again to enforce it as he never has enforced it before. Of how great consequence, then, it is to place ourselves in the right relation to this rule while opportunity continues. The Father's will is many a time, and clearly, expressed in these holy oracles which it is our privilege to read from day to day. It is expressed thus in the chapter before us : "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance ;

but as he that hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation ; because it is written, Be ye holy ; for I am holy." This is the Spirit's own standard. To reach it we must continually strive, for we are assured on the same authority of the Spirit that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Let there be no talk of this standard being too high ; this is the language of the unwise. We must rather accustom ourselves to the thought and the language of the Spirit, and labour to conform to that statute of the kingdom which requires us to "deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world."

We shall be greatly helped in this if we remember and in daily prayer realize that lovely aspect of the Eternal Mind presented by Peter when he says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his *abundant mercy* has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Our salvation is of God. Christ is of God. It is of His abundant mercy that we have hope. He is kind. He is love. He is not willing that any should perish. In Christ He invites all to come, saying, "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." In this we have strong consolation which comes like dew on the parched ground. Christ's resurrection was the Father's act, not by any rule of commercial satisfaction or equivalent, but of His "abundant mercy," the obstacle being removed in the condemnation of sin in the flesh : sin having been nailed to the tree in the body of His beloved one. According to His abundant mercy, which He was not compelled to show, He raised His beloved from the dead for our justification, that we who were dead in trespasses and sins might have hope who had none. The Father begat us again to this lively hope by the resurrection of His Son. The resurrection is everything, without which the condemnation of sin in the flesh would have been nothing. The apostasy destroys this by making the condemnation everything, and the resurrection of Christ a thing of which no reasonable account can be given so far as effecting our salvation is concerned. It errs also in making the condemnation bear on the "soul" so-called—the immaterial principle of life—instead of on the flesh—that "body of his flesh" in which through death we are reconciled (Col. 1 : 22). Certain good words and fair speeches have been sounded in our ears which would drag us in the same fatal direction. Let us be on our guard. There is need for the apostolic exhortation that we take heed that we lose not those things which we have wrought.

The comfort is to realize the whole arrangement as the Father's love. It is His way for His own honour and our salvation. We have but to learn what that way is and worship. The love that has devised it is a love passing knowledge. The goodness that will come of it eludes the highest effort of imagination. We are begotten "to AN INHERITANCE" such as no mortal ever possessed.

The highest state to which man can attain in this life is disfigured by the moth and rust that doth corrupt, and exposed to various kinds of thieves—including death, the most formidable of them—that break through and steal. The fine houses take much keeping in order ; the fine ways of life bring much labour ; this vile body wants much tending in bath-room and laundry to keep it even tolerable. All tends to decay and dissolution ; but "the inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away."

These characteristics apply to all its elements. Bodies spiritual, delivered from the tendency to decomposition inherent in all animal organizations ; faculties exalted ; emancipated from the heaviness and cloud that haze over the most brilliant of mortal powers ; life immortalized by the transmutation of our substance from the frail fibre of animal being to the indestructible tissues of spirit-body ; the society of impeccable immortals, radiant with life, light, and praise ; dominion secured in all the earth ; honour, wealth, joy, and renown our portion in the high places on earth when the voice of the scorner has ceased ; the earth a smiling paradise ; its valleys jubilant with righteous mirth ; "glory to God in the highest, goodwill toward men" ; health, blessing and plenty crowning all lands with joy ; time not dimming the glory or weakening the zest ; the advent of an enemy or an end to salvation impossible ; "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, that fadeth not away."

But meanwhile, it is "reserved in heaven." The Lord is there : therefore, all is there : for all this will come of him. We are not of those who make the mistake of supposing that because it is reserved in heaven, therefore we must go there to obtain it. We have listened to the exhortation which, in the same chapter, tells us to hope to the end "for the grace that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ." We are of those who look for his appearing in the love of it, knowing that the kingdom, which is the inheritance, will, at that time, appear also. Its being out of sight makes a demand on our faith and patience ; but we wait, knowing that He who hath promised is faithful, and that he who shall come will come, and will not tarry.

But to whom will his coming be a joy ? To all ? Nay, verily, to them "who are kept by the power of God through faith." The Gospel is the power (Rom. 1 : 16), and faith cometh by hearing it (Rom. 10 : 17). Those who keep it in memory (1 Cor. 15 : 2), are kept by the power of God through faith, if their memory be of the earnest sort recommended by Paul to the Hebrews, "giving the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." This memory depends upon compliance with another apostolic recommendation : "Give attendance to reading" ; "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby." A constant and diligent attendance upon this will include us among those "who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time."

"Wherein we greatly rejoice" ; yet our experience is that of those to whom Peter wrote : "For a season we are in heaviness, through manifold temptations." Our "temptation" may not be of precisely the same order as that of our brothers in the first century, but its operation and effects are the same. It is not joyous ; it presses on us unto weariness and groaning, and perhaps, tears ; but it is not accidental. It is part of the Father's programme "that the trial of our faith" may yield joyous results in the day of glory. If it be found unto "praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Christ," we shall not have suffered in vain. This will be if we come through trial-proof. Peter mentions gold in the furnace as an illustration. Our faith must not disappear in the process of trial. The gold may dissolve, but it is gold for all that, and is visible. Let us see to it that our faith fail not in the heaviness that comes with manifold temptations.

There is great joy, at last, if we overcome ; “ and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”

“ Whom having not seen, ye love,” says Peter. He does not say “ we,” because he was among those who had seen him. But thousands, in the first century, believed who had not seen. They believed on the same principle that men believe in anything they have not seen with their eyes. They believed on the evidence of credible eye-witnesses. This is the solid foundation of our faith. The apostles make a strong point of this always : “ We have not followed cunningly devised fables,” says Peter, “ when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were EYE-WITNESSES of his majesty” (2 Pet. 1 : 16). “ We cannot but speak the things which we have *seen and heard*” (Acts 4 : 20). “ That which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled ” (1 John 1 : 1). The men of the first century not only heard the testimony of eye-witnesses, of whose integrity they had a guarantee in the steadfastness with which they declared their testimony in the face of evil consequences, but they saw their word attested with wonders and signs. Our foundation is the same, but we, being on a higher stratum, get down to it by excavation. By the exercise of reason upon the facts of history, we are enabled to get to the same point of belief in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We have not seen him, but we believe he exists. We have not seen him, but we love him. How could we do otherwise than love him ? And this love constrains us as it constrained Paul, to do those things which he has required at our hands ; in much weakness, it may be ; in much sorrow and travail of soul, because of the hardness of the way ; but yet, in love, in hope, in faith, and in a certain sense, in joy unspeakable. We contemplate him as our High Priest, and are comforted ; we think of him as our Elder Brother, and we are drawn towards him. We remember him as God manifest, and bow before him in great awe. We remember him as our coming deliverer, and our hearts rise and our hearts fill with great joy. We recollect him as the Lamb slain, and, with all our hearts, we yearn for the opportunity of joining our song to those who, surrounding him in the day of his glory, will sing, “ Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and honour, and glory, and blessing. Amen, and Amen.”

The Breaking of Bread

Outside view of the Breaking of Bread.—Grounds of the world's hostility to it.—The enemy's power gone.—“Time, times, and a half” expired.—Trials of the hour.—Dangers of the situation.—The need of steadfastness.—A second apostasy.—The Lord's table a centre point.—Looking forward to meet him.—The joy of the prospect.—Christ a fellow-sufferer.—His present memory of suffering.—The sacrifice of Christ.—His resurrection and second appearing.

OUR meeting this morning has a meaning which is appreciated by those only who understand the truth, and by few of them as it ought to be. By the world without, it is regarded with quiet scorn. They see in it nothing but an idle ceremony—an effete piece of sacerdotalism—the lingering shadow of an ancient superstition. They may respect those who persevere in it from week to week; they may approvingly regard them as at least persons of sincerity, who act consistently with their professed convictions: but their respect is mixed with pity for what they consider weakness, and regret that honest purpose should be thrown away on what they regard as a bootless enterprise. Their feelings are also strongly tinctured with a resentful contempt for the implied condemnation of their own position; for of course our being right involves that they are fatally wrong. Indeed, this implied condemnation is at the bottom of all the hostility ever shown by the world towards those who walk in the way of God. “Only admit that we are right also,” say they, “and we will agree to differ”; but this is just what the believers of the Gospel cannot do; hence the traditional “enmity.” We have to thank God that we live in a day when the world has no power to give practical effect to its hostile feelings against the friends of Christ. There was a day when the law of the land would not have permitted us to assemble as we do this morning. There was a day when we should have been compelled to take refuge in the privacy of forest and glen, in order to carry out our Master's injunction to break bread in remembrance of him. But that day is gone, and gone for ever. The termination of the Papal ascendancy for 1,260 years is in no way more distinctly marked than in the total disappearance of all power on the part of the system personally and geographically headed up in Rome, to coerce the weakest of mankind against their conscience. The saints were “given into his hand” for time, times, and a half; that period is at an end, notwithstanding the attempts to prove the contrary by such as delight to say, “My Lord delayeth his coming.” Consequently, everywhere under heaven the saints are “out of the hand” of the apostasy, and at liberty, in any country where they may exist,* to assemble, in obedience to the injunction which brings us together this morning.

Nevertheless, the contempt of the world is a trial of a certain sort; the faithlessness of some professing the Name who say, “Who hath required this at your hands?” is a trial of another sort. The uncertainty of the time

* Even in Rome itself, where Protestants meet, and Bibles circulate under the very walls of the Vatican.

of the Lord's coming, notwithstanding the general and unmistakable indications that we are in the time of the end, and that he is at the door, forms another trial. The situation is rife with trials. What shall we say to this? There is just one enlightened answer. The heart enlightened in the principles on which God deals with all whom He chooses, instead of growing weary under trials, will, like Paul and his brother James, "count it all joy" to be thus put to the test. Trial is the order of the House of God; and in our day, when the sword is taken out of the hand of the magistrate, it is necessary, if we are to belong to this House, that we be put on a par with our brethren of past ages, by having trials in a form adapted to our time of freedom and privilege. A right view of the case will make us welcome these when they come. Paul said, in this view of the meaning of his sufferings: "I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake." A spiritual view of our affairs will lead us to entertain a similar sentiment with regard to those things we may be called on to endure through our identification with and our service of the one faith. They are far from agreeable; if they were agreeable, they would not answer their purpose, which is that by the mental exercise induced, we may become partakers of the Father's holiness. Pleasure would not exercise us in this direction, but contrariwise.

There is another pleasant side to "the sufferings of this present time"; they prepare a sweet future in a special sense. The joy of our deliverance will be in the ratio of our present sense of trouble. And this deliverance is not far off. "Though it tarry, wait for it." This is the Spirit's counsel. Suddenly, in the midst of our commonplace life, our ears will be made to tingle with the announcement that our waiting is past—that our warfare is accomplished—that the Lord is in the earth. For this, we are being prepared by evil and delay.

Meanwhile, it is ours to be steadfast. The Lord has not yet come; and we are to continue at this "till he come," unmoved by the instabilities everywhere manifesting themselves around us. The times are perilous for such as "have no root in themselves"; and even for those whose feet are on the track, there is danger. We hear of brethren forsaking the table of the Lord, and counselling all others to give it up as an institution of men. We hear of brethren denying the righteousness of God as revealed in the Gospel from faith to faith; teaching that no man is saved by the Gospel, and that none needs to be baptized. Many other vagaries are floating in the air, unsubstantial as the phantom ship, but for the time appearing as real. The circumstances impose on us the necessity for keeping close to the holy oracles in all things. We need not be surprised that some are inconstant and movable. In Paul's day, there was a disposition to be "carried about with every wind of doctrine," which called from him words of warning. There were men of cunning craftiness lying in wait to deceive, and some who were ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. There were those who, notwithstanding the warnings of the apostles, gave ear to "evil men and seducers," who drew away disciples after them, deceiving and being deceived. These in the old age of John had multiplied to "many antichrists." If this were so in the days of inspiration, we must not blind our eyes to similar possibilities in our time. We have the consolation that the second apostasy, which is now stalking through the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

brotherhood, will not be allowed to extinguish the truth a second time. It is comforting to know that the Lord, at his coming, finds some who are ready (Matt. 25 : 10) : some who will not taste of death (1 Cor. 15 : 51 ; 1 Thess. 4 : 17) ; some who, in the midst of a general forgetfulness of the Lord's coming, will be " found watching " (Luke 12 : 37) ; and, therefore, some who will steer safely through all the complications, snares, pitfalls, and dangers of the latter days, and remain steadfast to the end in the one faith and practice of the apostles. If " some " are to be found of the Lord at his coming in this blessed case, we may be amongst them. To be so found will require the exercise of vigilance and great circumspection : the more so as God has permitted the uprise of clever perverters, capable, almost, of deceiving the very elect. Those who slacken their vigilance are in danger of being taken captive to their destruction.

The table is a centre point, round which the disciples will be found assembling themselves to the very day of the Lord's appearing. Like the first-century disciples, they will to the last " continue steadfast in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers " (Acts 2 : 42). They will be found in the observance of all things which Jesus commanded the apostles (Matt. 28 : 20). Among these " all things " is this beautiful memorial supper, which combines so many interesting, sublime, and comforting features. Here we have the Lord represented in our midst. At the time he instituted it, he was at the table himself with his disciples, partaking with them. Their eyes rested on him whom to worship is not idolatry, and whom to love with our utmost devotion is a duty springing out of his own commandments. We cannot so look on him as they looked. We are assembled in his name, and he is, doubtless, cognizant of and attentive to us ; but we lack the refreshing satisfaction of those who saw, and heard and handled the Word of life (1 John 1 : 1). Yet this lack may prove much in our ultimate favour. It may ensure to us the blessedness expressed in the words of the Lord when he said to Thomas, " Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." Will it not be a great joy on that day to see himself, after assembling so many times in his absence in remembrance of him ? What a glorious termination to our patience to be permitted to sit down at the higher table in the kingdom of God ! It will come. We shall see him then as really as his disciples saw him when he rose and gird himself with a towel, and poured water and washed their feet ; but we shall see him in happier circumstances. We shall realize the full blessedness of the words he spoke when he said, " Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall *find watching* : verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." Our eyes will rest upon him with a rapturous sweetness when we behold him the living omnipotent fountain of the covenanted blessedness which is to prevail to the utmost bounds of the globe. We shall shout for joy when permitted to share his everlasting life, and " sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God." In the days of his flesh, men " wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth." What shall be our admiration in the day of his glory, when his superlative excellence in word and demeanour will not only be seen with our own eyes, and heard with our own ears, but seen and heard with such enlarged capacity to appreciate and enjoy. We

shall be like them that dream. Our mouth will be filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. We shall say, "The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad." Of all these glorious things we are reminded by the recollection that he broke bread 1,800 years ago, and said to his disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me."

Then this breaking of bread brings home to us the fact that before his exaltation, he was truly our brother—born of our common nature, a partaker of all our afflictions, standing in our position, bearing our sins, tasting our death, made in all things like unto his brethren. There is comfort in the thought that he trod the same path we are now treading, coming through the same experience of weakness, trial, faith and hope. There is force in the declaration that we have not an High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. There is strength for us in the fact that his sympathy is real and active; that though now exalted, he has not lost the memory of his woes, but remembers the time when he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Were he still a man only, he might have forgotten this long ago. The human brain is so feebly retentive of impressions that restoration to health soon wipes out the recollection of pain. The spiritual nature differs from the natural in this. Being the divine nature, its powers of recollection are like the source from which it springs—the Eternal Spirit, to whom nothing is ever forgotten. Here is, doubtless, one cause of the Deity's principle of prefacing eternal good with a period of trial and suffering. A distinct memory of that evil will be an element in the everlasting joy that is promised. The keenest enjoyments are those that immediately succeed the greatest sufferings. Take for illustration (inelegant perhaps, but forcible), the common case of toothache. A person suddenly relieved from this experiences a degree of pleasure which the man who has no pain does not feel, and which the sufferer himself will lose when the memory of his pain subsides. So long as the memory of his pain continues, the sweetness of relief is keen to the taste. If the memory of pain could be perpetuated, the delightful sensation of relief would be continued also; but because the pain-memory fades, the pleasure of relief fades also. There can be little doubt that in the spirit-nature, the memory of the present evil will be perpetuated, and thus the joy of salvation be ever fresh and delightful. It is on this principle that Jesus can after so long a time be touched with the feeling of our infirmity.

The breaking of this bread also reminds us that it pleased Jehovah to put His beloved Son to grief; that Jesus was not only made of a woman for us, and made subject to obedience for us, but died for us. The dread mystery of the Father's love is herein manifest. He loved us and was willing to forgive us, but first compelled us, in His beloved, to bow before the majesty of His sovereign supremacy, which was slighted in Eden, and set at naught in many generations. We do reverence to His great and holy Name in taking this broken bread in our hands, in token of our community with the solemn transaction of Calvary.

Above all, we remember his resurrection; that though crucified through weakness, he liveth by the power of God, and at the appointed time—the time of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets—he will re-appear and bring with him times of much refreshing from on high. The memory of these things is able to

strengthen us in the days and conditions of our pilgrimage. It reconciles us to the position of strangers and sojourners, as all the fathers were ; having here no continuing city, but seeking one to come, and that a glorious one, possessing all those attributes of righteousness, holiness, knowledge and love which will gladden our hearts with inexpressible joy, and cause us to join in loud and thankful praises to Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb. Well may we say to each other : “ Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

Reproach

“ Bearing reproach without the camp ”—The type in the law.—The excommunicated and despised believers in Israel.—A modern parallel.—Separation from the names and denominations.—The reasons.—The true pillar and ground of the truth.—The truth a unity composed of many elements.—The necessity for each element having its place.—The popular system.—The truth reversed in many particulars.—The Trinity.—Immortal soulism.—Hell torments.—Substitutionary atonement heaven-gaining.—The partial holding of the truth.—False cry of charity.—Holding the truth in unrighteousness.—Making our calling and election sure.—Dangerous extremes.—The barred gate of the kingdom.

OUR attention has been called this morning to the remarkable exhortation of Paul to the Hebrews, in the 13th chapter of his epistle to them, verse 13 : “ Let us go forth therefore unto him *without the camp*, bearing his reproach.” This exhortation had a meaning for those to whom Paul was writing which it cannot have for us. They were Jews who, like himself, had been brought up in subjection to the Mosaic institutions in all particulars, and whose acceptance of Christ brought upon them excommunication from the synagogue, and all the reproach connected with an apparent apostasy from a divine institution, and an acceptance of what was accounted a cunningly devised and magically supported imposture. Their steadfastness was put under a powerful strain in having to accept an apparent dissociation from Moses, by whom all were agreed God had spoken ; and in having to associate with one who had the reputation of being the destroyer of the law of Moses, and whose undoubted end as a crucified companion of felons, brought him under the curse of the law of Moses.

It was true comfort that Paul administered to them, when he said to the Romans that his doctrine of Christ, so far from “ making void ” the law, “ established ” it. It was similar consolation for them to be told that Christ had said, “ Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets : I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” Writing directly to themselves, Paul had told them that the law, though divine, was but “ a figure for the time then present,” pointing forward to Christ, in whom all its hidden significances had an end. This was his declaration on the subject as a whole. In the exhortation under consideration, he makes a particular application

of it in a matter of detail. He reminds them that "the bodies of those beasts whose blood was brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, were burned *without the camp*," involving the recollection that anyone availing himself of the ceremonial purification connected with the use of the ashes of the beast, had to go out of the camp to get at them; a typical foreshadowing of the fact that when the real purification from sin was provided, Israelites would have to go outside the national camp to obtain the benefit. In harmony with the figure, Christ "suffered without the gate," in being proscribed by the national authorities, and in being crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem. From this it was easy and natural to extract the further figuration, by which the position of Jesus at the time of his crucifixion is made to represent the excommunicated and despised position of those of Israel who afterwards believed on his name. It was a natural climax to say, "Let us go forth therefore to him without the camp, bearing his reproach."

We cannot apply this to ourselves in a direct manner this morning. We are not Jews, who in accepting Christ have had to turn our backs upon what is called Judaism, and to go forth with courage to brave the reproach of those remaining in the camp. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which we are called upon to submit to such an ordeal. We have had to go forth from a certain camp, bearing the reproach of Christ, and dating historically back to the work of the apostles in the first century. We have left that camp, with all the attractions that belong to a popular establishment. We cannot assemble with the respectable crowds that fill the commodious religious edifices that abound in every town. We cannot take part in their opulent arrangements, or join their imposing and comfortable services. We have chosen to step out of the flourishing throng; to desert the attractive festivals of popular faith; to stand aloof from the profitable associations of "the names and denominations" of religion. We have accepted the obscurity and the dishonour of hole-and-corner meetings apart from the rich and powerful. It has been a hard resolution to take, not only because of the temporal disadvantage of our decision—not only because of the sacrifice of present gratifications of society, and the acceptance of present mortifications to the natural man and the spiritual too, but because the system of religion around us accepts Christ by profession. If these systems said, "We reject Christ," our course would have been much easier; instead of that, they profess his name, and proclaim themselves his servants. It has in consequence been a great exercise of mind for us to consider whether we are justified in leaving a system professedly subject to Christ, and taking a step which by implication passes condemnation on them as an unchristian thing. But we have not faltered when all the facts were fully before us for decision.

We have learnt that the true "house of God, which is the church of the living God, is *the pillar and ground of THE TRUTH*" (1 Tim. 3 : 15); and that men and systems may say, "Lord, Lord," and may even claim to have done wonderful things in his name, and yet have no claim to his recognition at his coming, by reason of their non-submission to his requirements. Consequently, we have asked—Is the religious system under which we were born "the pillar and ground of the truth"? A pillar supports, holds up. Does the religious system support, hold up, the truth? "Ground" gives a

SEASONS OF COMFORT

resting-place, a basis, a foundation. Does the religious system act as a foundation, a resting-place for "the truth"? We have been able to answer this with an emphatic negative when we have come to know what "the truth" is.

This phrase "the truth" is very comprehensive. "The truth" we find to be made up of many things which require to be put together before we can have the whole thing so defined. For instance, it is true that God exists; but to believe that God exists is not to believe the comprehensive thing meant by "the truth." The Jews believed in God's existence: and yet Paul had "continual sorrow of heart" because they were not in the way of salvation. The truth is not only the fact that God exists, but that He has said and done certain things, and given to us certain commandments. It is part of the truth that Christ was crucified; but to believe this is not of itself to believe the truth. Jews and infidels believe that Christ was crucified, but reject the truth of which that is an element. It is part of the truth that Christ rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples; but if these facts are disconnected from his ascension and the promise of his return to raise the dead and establish his kingdom, the belief of them does not constitute a belief of "the truth." So with every element of "the truth" by turns; they must all have their place in relation to the rest, or we fail to receive and hold the truth.

Now, when we try the system around us by this test, we find it is the very opposite of being "the pillar and ground of the truth." It lacks, yea rejects, the very first principles of the oracles of God. It teaches a triune instead of the one God; it asserts man to be immortal instead of mortal; it declares torment instead of death the wages of sin; it preaches the death of Christ as a "substitutionary" satisfaction of the divine law, instead of a declaration of the righteousness of God (Rom. 3:25) in the condemnation of sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3), as a basis on which the forbearance of God offers the forgiveness of all who recognize themselves "crucified with Christ" (Rom. 3:25; Gal. 2:20). It proclaims death instead of resurrection the climax of the believer's hope; it preaches heaven instead of earth as the inheritance of the meek. It affirms our going, instead of Christ's coming, as the means and occasion of the promised reward. And so forth. The dissimilarities might be enumerated in other points. Instead of being "the pillar and ground of the truth," the religious system around us is the puller-down and scatterer of the truth. How, then, could we hesitate to "come out from among them"? It is part of apostolic doctrine that we are not to be identified with any who bring not the doctrine of Christ, whatever their profession (2 John 10; Rev. 14:9; Rom. 16:17). Consequently, we could not remain in popular fellowship without the danger of being responsible for their errors. This is the explanation of our position this morning in having gone forth out of the popular camp, unto Christ, bearing the reproach incident in our professedly Christian day to a profession of his truth.

It is well also to recognize the fact that the principle which isolates us from popular communion isolates us also from the fellowship of all who reject any part of the truth. Some accept the truth in part, but are either unable or unwilling to receive it in its entirety. They believe in the kingdom, but reject the Bible doctrine of death; or they hold the mortal nature of

man, but do not receive the restoration of the kingdom again to Israel ; or they accept both, but deny the judgment ; or believe in the judgment, but deny the kingdom ; or accept all three, but reject the apostolic doctrine of Christ's nature and death ; and so on. Such persons are generally what is called very "charitable" : that is, they are willing to connive at any amount of doctrinal diversity so long as friendliness is maintained. They are lovers of peace. Peace is certainly very desirable when it can be had on a pure foundation : but the charitable people referred to are not particular about the foundation. They will compromise the truth in some one or other of its integral elements for the sake of personal harmony. This is a spurious charity altogether. We are not at liberty to relax the appointments of God. The exercise of "charity" must be confined to our own affairs. We have no jurisdiction in God's matters. What God requires is binding on us all ; and the faithful man cannot consent to accept any union that requires a jot or tittle to be set aside or treated as unimportant. Such a man cannot consent to form a part of any community that is not "the pillar and ground of the truth."

There is just another side to this question which cannot be too well remembered, and that is that the possession of the truth in its entirety does not necessarily ensure acceptance with Christ at his coming. The Scriptures speak of "those who *hold the truth* IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS," and declares that the end of such will be "indignation, anguish, and wrath." Consequently, no one should rest on the knowledge and belief of the truth as securing his salvation without failure. That knowledge is of great value to him. In the obedience to it in baptism it brings him into relation with Christ, who is the righteousness of God ; invested with whose name he stands a forgiven man, "purged from his old sins." But he has a life to live after that, and Christ shall judge that life at his coming ; and it will all depend upon his estimate of that life as to how he will deal with the person. He will give to every man "according to his works." In the case of some, he will "blot their name out of the book of life." He will take away their part out of the holy city. He will refuse recognition and dismiss the refused to the society of the adversary, at that time about to be "devoured." In the case of others, he will confess their names, and invite them to inherit the kingdom of God. There is no sane man who would not desire to be among the latter. There is a principle upon which admission is predicated. The doctrines of the apostasy have obliterated this principle. They teach that men have "only to believe that Christ has paid their debts, and that they have nothing to do but believe that Christ died for them." Whereas the exhortation of Peter is to be "diligent to *make our calling and election SURE*" ; that only "if we do these things (which he had enumerated) we shall never fall." This is the uniform teaching of Christ and his servant Paul. Jesus says it is vain to acknowledge him unless we do what he commands (Matt. 7 : 21). Paul says every man at the judgment seat of Christ shall receive according to that he hath done (2 Cor. 5 : 10) ; and that he who doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong that he hath done (Col. 3 : 25). Consequently, it rests with us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2 : 12), as obedient children, not fashioning ourselves according to our former lusts in our ignorance, but as he that hath called us is holy, so must we be holy in all manner of conversation.

There is a natural tendency to overlook this phase of the work of Christ, unless we are on our guard. The popular habit of depreciating the importance of doctrine is liable to have the effect of shutting us up entirely to the fact that apart from a knowledge of the truth, we cannot be saved. We are in danger of shutting our eyes to the equally certain truth that a knowledge of the truth will be of no value to us if it fail to effectuate that purification of heart—that moral and intellectual assimilation to the divine character which it is intended to produce in all who are called to the holy calling. We can only avoid this dangerous extreme by a habitual and meditative reading of the holy oracles. In this exercise, day by day, we shall be made acquainted with the full and noble breadth of the divine work, in the practical transformation of men. We shall not fail to perceive that Christ made the state of the heart and the character of our actions the most prominent feature of his teaching. He preached the Kingdom of God, it is true, and constantly did so ; but this, only as the framework of his instruction. The character of those who would inherit that kingdom, was constantly the burden of his speech to those around him. And we shall only resemble him and take part truly in his work, in proportion as we do the same. And, what is more solemnly true, we can only hope for an entrance into his kingdom in the day of his glory if we are of the same mind and work as he. It is written, " There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie " (Rev. 21 : 27). Men—aye, even such as are called brethren, may forget or be indifferent to this meanwhile, but they will discover at last that the word of the Lord standeth sure, and that the gate of eternal glory will be barred against everyone who conforms not to the divine standard revealed in the Word. The fact may appear a stern one, but its effect as regards the house of God will be only good and glorious : it will secure a perfect fellowship, composed of such as know God and delight in His praise, and in the delightful love one to another that glows in every heart that truly seeks His face.

Refreshment

Refreshment for the travellers.—The 72nd Psalm.—A twofold significance.—Solomon and Christ.—Duality in divine scheme throughout.—Abel's offering and the Lamb of God.—First and second covenants.—The first restoration of Israel and the second.—Moses and Christ.—Allegory in first events of Israel's history.—Christ in the 72nd Psalm.—Prospects for the poor.—Mortal rule inefficient.—The reign of Christ infallible.—Christ's immortal and infallible assistants.—The perfection of the Kingdom of God.—The preparation of saints.—The explanation of delay.—Christ's present superintendence of his house.—Suffering no proof of neglect.—The good effects of regulated trouble.—Joy ahead.—Glorious multitude made perfect through suffering.—The final song.—Wait.

WE come together again as thirsty travellers on a journey, to find refreshment at the inexhaustible well of living water provided for the pilgrims of God. And we come together not in vain. The water is cold and of a crystal clearness, cooling the parched mouth and restoring vigour to the failing limbs; and partaking thereof, the pilgrims renew their journey with revived strength, hope and courage. We need these periodical refreshments. The journey is long and toilsome, the way is hard and our strength is small. Waiting for the promises of God in a day like ours, when there is no open vision, and when the divine economy is in the dust and the power of the Gentile triumphs over all, is a trying situation for flesh and blood. We walk by faith and not by sight. This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith, and faith cometh by hearing the Word of God. Whatever strengthens faith helps the victory. We have nothing in our day to strengthen faith except the written Word and the communion with God in prayer which that Word engenders. We are here to-day to attend on both in that appointed assembly of the saints in which both have their highest power developed.

Let us look at what we have brought forward in the portions read this morning—Psalm 72 and Luke 24. There is a certain connection between both, though so far apart as regards their place in the Bible and the time at which they were written. The conversation recorded in the latter tells us by the mouth of Jesus, that all things that are written in the Psalms concerning him must be accomplished. Hence there are things in the Psalms concerning Christ. That the 72nd Psalm presents us with some of those things is abundantly evident in a variety of ways. True, it is written at the head of the Psalm that it is a psalm “for, of, or concerning Solomon”; but this does not exclude its application to Jesus, even if written there by the hand of David. We know that there is such a thing in the sayings of the Spirit as a double application. Two meanings are hit off in the same expression, the one covering the other so to speak. This is illustrated in the case of the covenant made with David by the hand of Nathan concerning Christ, which David, in his last words, declared to have been “all his salvation and all his desire,” though unrealized at the time of writing. Both David and Solomon applied this covenant to Solomon. Yet we know

SEASONS OF COMFORT

by the Spirit in the prophets and in the apostles, that the Spirit intended a further and final application to another Son of David who will be Lord of David as well as his Son. David himself so applies it in several of the Psalms agreeably with the declaration of Peter, that David, being a prophet, knew that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; and that he, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2 : 29). The prophets, long after Solomon's death, tell us that the days will come when God will perform that good thing which He hath promised to the house of Israel, that He will raise to David a righteous branch (offspring) who as a king should reign and prosper, and execute justice and judgment in the earth. That this is Jesus is for ever settled by the words of the angel to Mary concerning him : " The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David : and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever ; and of his kingdom there shall be no end " (Luke 1 : 33).

This idea of a double application at first sight seems bewildering ; but the embarrassment disappears as we grow acquainted with the Divine scheme and understand the principles upon which it is founded. One of these, particularly useful in this matter, is the duality that runs through the whole of it, that is, a first and a second—the one as a preparation for the other. At the very beginning, we see the accepted burnt offering of Abel to be followed by the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. We see the first covenant made with Israel ; and we read, " The days come that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel." As Paul says, " He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second." There is the first deliverance of Israel from Egypt, a pre-figuring of their restoration from " all the lands " whither they have been driven. There is the establishment of the nation under Moses, and the coming establishment under Christ. Now, we are instructed by the Spirit in the apostles that the first and imperfect in all these arrangements was a shadow, type, or prefigurement of the second and perfect. Hence it is that even the literal history of the house of Israel is a type or foreshadowing of that which is to come. Who would have supposed, had not Paul told us, that the dismissal of Hagar and her son from the household of Abraham was an " allegory " ? (Gal. 4 : 24). Many other types besides that are to be found in Israel's history, and among others, the reign of Solomon, pointing to the greater than Solomon, who though having appeared, is yet to come. Hence it is that the 72nd Psalm, though probably suggested to David by the elevation and prospects of Solomon, outlines to us a reign as far excelling Solomon's as the sun exceeds the light of an oil lamp.

But independently of this reason for applying the Psalm to Christ, there are statements in the Psalm that were not realized in Solomon, such as that men " shall be blessed in him." Israel, doubtless, experienced benefit from the earlier part of his reign, but not in the form or to the extent that will be realized when " all the families of the earth " will be blessed in Abraham and his seed, the Christ. It was not the result of Solomon's reign to bring about the state of things described in the following words : " They shall fear thee *as long as the sun and the moon endure*, throughout all generations." " In his days shall the righteous flourish ; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth." In no sense could the following

have been prophetically affirmed of Solomon : " His name shall endure for ever ; his name shall be continued as long as the sun : and men shall be blessed in him : all nations shall call him blessed."

To Christ, doubtless, in the fullest sense the Psalm applies ; to him for whom we wait this morning, who having been in the earth once is withdrawn for a time till the appointed season of his re-appearance (now at hand) to develop the glorious scene depicted in this sunlit Psalm. With this confidence let us look at it and be comforted. What do we see ? A king who, in the possession of universal dominion and power, " saves the children of the needy, and breaks in pieces the oppressor " ; a king, who, though surrounded with all the circumstances of regal splendour, and receiving the homage of " all kings falling down before, and all nations serving him," looks after the poor and attends to the cry of the needy. " He shall deliver the needy when he crieth ; the poor also, and *him that hath no helper.*" Such a king as this the world has never seen before. The poor have no chance under any form of government. If they can obtain the good offices of some influential personage—if they can enlist the mediation of a Member of Parliament, or some official person near headquarters, possibly they may receive attention, but " the poor that hath *no helper* " is in a hopeless case indeed. This is the inevitable result of the fact that man reigns. Many things make it impossible for a mortal ruler to dispense a full and merciful justice to all. Being fallible, he is liable to be deceived by the cunning misrepresentations of the sinister. Therefore he is obliged to adopt a system which, while it keeps off the impostor, keeps the true also at a distance. His physical energy is not equal to the demands of a full administration of justice in the multitude of cases that arise. Therefore, he has to depute the work to representatives, who, mortal like himself, have to administer the law by round-about rules, which unprincipled cleverness can manipulate to the advantage of the evil and the hurt of the innocent. The result is, " justice " is a clumsy and blundering machine, worked without sympathy or discrimination, mangling the innocent both in what it does and what it prevents being done, and leaving wickedness to flourish in society like a green bay tree.

But this king will be hampered by none of these difficulties. " He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears " (Isa. 11 : 3). The Spirit of Jehovah resting upon him, he discerns the secrets of the heart, and goes straight to the root of the matter, dispensing with the prolix and expensive processes at law to which men are obliged to resort. Then he " stands and feeds in the strength of the Lord his God " (Micah 5 : 4). Human weakness and weariness are alike unknown to him. Like the Creator of the ends of the earth, who tabernacles in him in the fulness of Spirit-power, " he faints not, neither is weary, and there is no searching of his understanding." Consequently, the dispensation of justice will be as unhindered by fatigue as unmarred by error.

There is another reason why the government of this Son of David is able to deal thoroughly and minutely with the wants of mankind. The reason is not apparent in the Psalm, but we learn it from many other portions of the writings of the Spirit ; he is assisted in the work of ruling the world by a body of kings like himself—immortal and infallible. His brethren having " suffered with him," " reign with him." They are

SEASONS OF COMFORT

“ kings and priests unto God,” and reign with him a thousand years. The beauty and necessity of this arrangement will be seen on a moment’s reflection. A single king, however endowed, could not deal with the teeming millions of the earth. A single king is wanted as the common head—the director and controller of universal power, but for the administration of his authority in detail, many co-operators are required. But if this co-operation were entrusted to the hands of sinners, the beneficence of Christ’s government would be as effectually frustrated as the good designs of good rulers always have been in the hands of evil instruments. The government of an immortal and infallible king must needs be in the hands of immortal and infallible associates. Herein lies the perfection of the kingdom of God. Christ will be represented in every part of the globe by a fellow-heir as free from error and weakness as himself, and as compassionate of the people as the Great Head, from whose judgment there will be no appeal.

It is the preparation of this body of fellow kings and priests that explains the present “ delay ” as we inaccurately call it, in the consummation of the divine purpose. But for this, the kingdom of God might have been set up 1,800 years ago. “ My wedding must be furnished with guests,” is the parabolic announcement by which the Lord taught the necessity for sending an invitation to the Gentiles after the Jews had rejected it. But not only had the invitation to go forth ; the people responding to the invitation had to be trained and fitted for the position to which they were called. This is Christ’s present work ; he is “ priest over his own house ”—bringing his house to God. It was this that made his departure necessary, as he told his disciples : “ I go to prepare a place for you.” His present absence and his present work are necessary to the glorious consummation of “ his appearing and his kingdom.” He is not idle or passive, though unseen. He is at work in the preparation of his people. His messages to the seven ecclesias in Asia represent him as watchful and vigilant in the superintendence of the affairs of his house. His priesthood involves this ; for mediation between God and men requires that he should know the affairs of men. Paul tells us that having suffered being tempted, Jesus is able to succour them that are tempted. This indicates the active superintendence referred to. He is still the shepherd of his sheep. From behind the veil he tends them invisibly, but not the less really. “ As many as I love,” he says, “ I rebuke and chasten ” (Rev. 3 : 19). This is also what Paul says : “ When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world ” (1 Cor. 11 : 32). It follows that, even now, we are under his guidance if we sincerely aim at the doing of his will, and that in the affairs of our common experience, his hand intervenes for that direction of our steps which will be to our profit. What if those affairs are chequered and trying ? What if trouble harass and evil afflict ? Shall we say he regards us not ? This would be a very illogical as well as a very unhappy conclusion. He himself has come through a time of trouble ; he was, in the days of his flesh, a man of afflicted experience. Shall we say that God did not guide him because he suffered ? Yea, rather, his suffering was an evidence of his being guided. “ Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.” It is God’s method of perfecting character and laying the foundation of lasting joy. We may be quite sure there is no mistake in it. We may be quite sure that God’s way is the best. We may be quite sure that

goodness will be all the sweeter, and salvation all the more precious, and glory to God all the more fervent, for the prelude of suffering and weariness and waiting that goes before. We know from experience that no one is ripe till he has known trouble. He may be good, but he is unsympathetic. He may be interesting, but he is not entirely disinterested. There is always a degree of refined selfishness (and sometimes not very refined) about those who have known only pleasure. Trouble, if there be the right stuff to work on, removes the dross of the character, subdues and purifies and refines and ennobles, and makes fit for the kingdom of God. Therefore it is that the community of the glorified saints, as a whole, are described in the Apocalypse as "those who have come out of great tribulation." The tribulation "tries and purifies and makes white, even to the time of the end" (Dan. 11 : 35). In our day we may not have it in the intense form in which the saints of the first century were subjected to it. Nevertheless, if we are true saints, we are not without our true share of purifying tribulation. We cannot be in the true "waiting" position without tasting tribulation in various ways. It is mild, perhaps, but slow and long-continued, and therefore burdensome to flesh and blood—perhaps more so than the tragic suffering to which first century believers were subjected. It is testified of the Lord Jesus that "for the joy set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame." We must transfer this endurance to ourselves, though our suffering and our shame be less than his. We keep up under it and persevere, and not without a reason. There is "joy" ahead—great joy, such as has not entered into the heart of man to conceive. What nobler or more desirable prospect could be set us than the prospect of being admitted to the multitudinous community of men made perfect through suffering, who will stand revealed from the dust by resurrection in the day of the Lord's manifestation from heaven with his mighty angels?—men redeemed from the weakness that environed them in the days of their flesh; men changed from the mortal to the immortal; men, once lowly and way-worn pilgrims, now surrounded by a vast and rejoicing congregation of their own class; men, once of no esteem and spoken against, suddenly elevated from the lowest situation to the high places of the earth, and surrounded with glory and honour at the hands of the choicest of mankind and the most honourable of angels; men who had once laboriously to follow the ways of righteousness in obscurity and amid the embarrassments of poverty and lowly circumstances, now placed in circumstances of unspeakable affluence; men trodden down and despised in the days of their faith, now in the endless day of their "sight," wielding the iron rod of irresistible authority throughout the world; men strong, beautiful, glorious, wise, immortal, once disowned by the common herd of mankind, but now honoured with the recognition and fellowship of the Son of God. No wonder there rises from that wonderful assembly a song like the roar of many waters and mighty thunderings, ascribing praise and thanksgiving to him whose wisdom and patience have achieved so grand a climax through ages of suffering. Oh, what are the longest of our waitings, the severest of our trials, in the light of that glorious day! We can fervently join with Paul and say, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." Patience, brethren, patience. The night will surely end; the morning will come at last.

It may sometimes be as it was with the children of Israel when Moses first demanded of Pharaoh to let them go. Their burdens were increased, and their afflictions at the hand of the taskmaster were so intensified as the result of Moses' interference, that when he comforted them with the prospect of release, "they hearkened not unto him for anguish of spirit." The prospect of the Lord's coming has so long been a matter of faith and hope, and has yet done nothing for us so far as material results are concerned but embarrass our temporal relations, that we may, in anguish of spirit, refuse the comfort of the promise, and say with Israel, "Let us alone that we may serve the Egyptians." Let us beware of this propensity. "Though the vision tarry," saith the Spirit, "wait for it; because it will surely come . . . at the end it shall speak, and not lie." He that endureth to the end the same shall be saved. Blessed are those servants whom their Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching. The moment will come when our watching will be over, and when the announcement will ring through all ecclesias, penetrating even to the sleeping dust and waking a multitude of the dead, "Christ has come at last."

God "A Sun and Shield"

The day approaching.—Like a ship at the end of long voyage.—Signs.—The effect of such a situation.—The consolation for the obedient.—God's kindness.—"A sun and shield."—Its existence independent of creature recognition.—The mode of reconciliation.—The glorious upshot.—The goodness of God a comfort to think about.—Sunrise and defence.—Chastisement.—An important discrimination.—Prosperity not necessarily blessedness.—Good and evil divinely regulated.—The case of Job.—Adversity no evidence of divine desertion.—Tribulation necessary for preparation.—Tribulation inevitable in this state of spiritual barrenness.—The world lying in wickedness.—The sufferings of Christ at every man's door.—Unscriptural and dangerous talk.—Only one standard.—Saints not of this world.—The true service of Christ.—The narrowness of the way and the reason.—Trial only for a time.—The glory to be revealed.

"So much the more as ye see the day approaching": these are words that increase in their emphasis as each month rolls by. The signs of the approaching end multiply as the end approaches. The Eastern Question, spread out on the political sky, tells us, above all other signs, that the Lord is near. That question is entering upon a transformation phase, which is likely to see England in her appointed position in Egypt and the Holy Land. When this happens, we may expect the long knocking at the door to cease, and the door itself to open and the Lord to appear; for England, in that position, forms part of the adventual tableaux.

The long talk of the Lord's coming will end in the event itself, and that end is close upon us, though how close we cannot exactly say. The great prophetic periods are nearly all elapsed: and the tokens are visible on every hand to the eyes able to see, but the exact place in the latter-day programme

at which the Lord appears to his house is unknown. We are like a ship at the end of a long voyage. We have traversed the great ocean for many months, letting the months stand for the centuries that have passed since Christ's departure. We know by the general reckonings that we are not far from land; and our conclusion on this head is confirmed by the altered appearance of the sea, the shallowness of the soundings, the land-mists on the horizon, and certain tokens in the shape of birds, sea-weed, and other things; but exactly how many miles we are from port, we do not know. We know we are so near that the pilots may come in sight at any moment.

Such a situation is full of an interest almost painful. The effect of it is to make us look more earnestly than ever in the face of the great principles that affect our relation to the Coming Deliverer. These are always brought before us in the symbols once more before us on the table; and generally in a more or less direct way in the Scripture portions read. Let us look at those a little on the present occasion for comfort; for the Word of God is intended for comfort as well as for reproof. For everything there is a season and a time: all things by turns. Yet in looking for the comfort, let us never forget that it is for them only who are in a position to lay hold of it, in having humbled themselves entirely before the God of all comfort in His crucified Son, and given themselves freely to Him a living sacrifice, and in being of those who do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the Father by him in everything; and who run in the way of his commandments. Assuming this foundation to exist, as proclaimed by our participation in the emblems of the broken body and shed blood of the Lord, let us look at the consolation there is for those who have fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the Gospel.

It is brought before us in a certain form in the words of the Psalm: "The Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly" (Psa. 84:11). Here we have a most encouraging picture of the kindness of Him with whom we have to do. This character is the central glory of revelation. We fail, perhaps, at all times to remember it sufficiently. Many things help to cloud it from our view. Our weakness, our short-comings, our pre-occupations in other directions, the weariness of the constant fight of faith, and other things, prevent us from realizing as constantly as we might, that the Eternal Father, who invites us to Himself by Christ, is full of tenderness and compassion and overflowing with loving-kindness to such as keep His covenant, and even abounding in long-suffering and goodness towards those who are far from Him. Our failure in this respect is part of the weakness of our present nature; but our failure to apprehend does not interfere with the fact. God is love, even if we faint and fail. The everlasting hills are not endangered when we grow tired and sleepy. The strength of God is in no way diminished when we die. So His loving-kindness is none the less because we forget. Yea, it operates sometimes in the inverse ratio of our weakness. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them who fear him; for he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." He loved us while we were yet enemies. He provided his Son to die while death and darkness reigned throughout the world. He raised him when none comprehended the loving mystery. He established this propitiatory—this meeting point of reconciliation—while we yet

wandered far from Him in disregard and alienation. Not that He required to be propitiated ; not that He needed reconciliation. The kindness was with Him ; the advance was from Him ; it was our reconciliation that was sought by "God who was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." In Christ crucified He gave us the declaration of His righteousness, that bowing down before this, and identifying ourselves with it in baptism, we might exalt His holiness and remember His forgiveness and friendship. All this was arranged before we knew anything about it ; and the goodness that contrived this kindness is as great today as before it was announced by the apostolic ministration to the world. "His mercy endureth for ever." Its reality and its greatness will be fully manifest when we attain unto "the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." We shall then see the full meaning of Paul's words : "He hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus ; that *in the ages to come* he might show the *exceeding riches of his grace*, IN HIS KINDNESS TOWARD US through Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2 : 6, 7). Well might the apostles, to whom the ministry of reconciliation was entrusted, entreat men to be reconciled to God. The mode of the reconciliation is contrived on such a principle that His glory is the upshot of it in the mouth of everyone reconciled ; but individual well-being in the most exquisite form it is possible to conceive of is none the less the result to them on this account. In fact their individual well-being is all the more glorious because realized on the foundation of God's exaltation. It has been well said that the highest glory of God is the supremest good of man. We see it in measure even now, but in the day of the consummated purpose, we shall see it in a manner that hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive.

It is profitable to let the mind rest thus in the contemplation of what God has revealed concerning His goodness. It is a stay and a comfort and a defence in the present time of evil. It is a star of hope in the midnight sky, a great uplifting power in the present depressing animal state of existence. It acts with the mighty influence of well-founded hope, purifying and ennobling the mental man, and saving us from the slavery of petty temporal life. It is a soothing balm and a stimulating cordial. It comes closer even than hope ; it gives faith in a present beneficence. It is a pledge of present goodness. God is a sun and a shield even now. It is to the present time peculiarly that these same words apply. They were written concerning those who walk uprightly in a time of evil ; in the ages to come there will be no evil to be protected from. It is now, when the wicked walk on every side, and when snares through all our way are strewn, that righteous men most need the comfort of the fact that the Lord God is a sun and shield. What an expressive figure it is ! How cheerless and gloomy and unwholesome is the earth without the sun. Let the sun arise, and what a change takes place ! He seems to fill the expanse with an ocean of light and life, in which we bathe with sensations of exquisite delight. There is healing and joy and beauty in his beams.

Such is God, and more : a shield also. In the finest sunlight, violence might assail or the beast of prey devour. Defence is needed, therefore, to complete the picture. If God defend, no evil can befall. Jesus teaches us to pray for this : "Deliver us from evil." But let us judge wisely in the matter. A father who defends his child continually from mortal calamity may himself

inflict upon him pain by the rod, or assign him for his good a part to fulfil which will be irksome or even painful. The child would judge wrongly if he were to say his father did not act a beneficent part because he subjected him to chastisement and hard tasks. So we must not say that because God is a sun and a shield to those who walk uprightly, nothing but prosperity will be their lot. True blessing may require them to be put through sharp adversity. Every case must be judged by its issue. A man flourishing in this life to the loss of life eternal is not blessed. If in order to guide a man into the kingdom of God, a crooked path is needed, then God shows Himself a sun and shield in twisting his path for him—a sun in shining upon him unto life ; a shield in fencing him from those circumstances that would be fatal to his steps. This is a most important discrimination. Apart from it, many mistakes will be made. The Psalmist himself gives us an illustration of this. He says, " My feet were almost gone ; my steps had well-nigh slipped. *For I was envious at the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked . . .* Until I went into the sanctuary of God ; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places." It is very natural to argue that prosperity is an evidence of divine favour and adversity the reverse ; but it is often far from correct. God does sometimes prosper the righteous, as in the case of Joseph in Egypt ; and, in the final sense, there is nothing but prosperity in reserve for Joseph's class, and nothing but adversity and ruin for the accursed of God. But in the present provisional and preliminary state, trouble is more frequently the portion of the chosen of God than the reverse—the explanation being that trouble is a necessary part of the process by which they are developed for the endless ages of blessedness to come after. It is in this relation of things that we comprehend Paul's doctrine of chastisement : " What son is he whom the father chasteneth not ? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all (the sons) are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons." " Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." The practical application of all these principles lies here : " *ALL things* (good things and evil things) work together for good to them who love God ; who are the called according to his purpose." God knows when the good things are safe and when the evil things are needed ; and the scriptural attitude is to accept, with a reverential submission, whatever comes ; if good, with thanksgiving : if evil, with resignation. It would be altogether a mistake to assume that goodness only will be our lot, or that God regards us not if He suffer evil to happen.

Job is ever a helpful illustration on this point. A man of the thoroughly approved stamp, God overthrew him in all his affairs without letting him know that he was being subjected to a test. Job, while asserting his integrity, took it all in submission, on the ground that God was supreme and did as He willed, and that man, as a created being, had no room to murmur if evil as well as good were his lot. In this Job took the right ground ; for his judgment of the case was divinely endorsed as against that of his three friends, who argued that because Job had fallen into evil, therefore he must have been unrighteous. Now, why was Job's case recorded ? Like all other ancient examples, it was " written for our instruction " ; " it happened to them for ensamples (to us) " (1 Cor. 10 : 11). If so, it follows that we may sometimes be put to a similar proof if we are worthy of the test. Con-

SEASONS OF COMFORT

sequently, we shall argue wrongly if we say God has forsaken us when something has gone wrong, or that things will always and necessarily go well with us. Can we expect to be better off in these things than the servants of God who have gone before? And what is their history? One and all, they came through sore trouble. The Lord himself was the greatest sufferer of all, and is it not written, "We must suffer with him"? Nay, is it not the very characteristic of the great assembly of which we hope to form a part that they "came out of great tribulation"? Paul told the disciples that "we must through tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." We do not live in the days of their tribulation, but we must not marvel if we have our share, peculiar to our own times. It is a necessity if we are ever to be worth anything in the Master's service. What preparation is a bed of roses for the great muster of those who have been tried and purified and made white?

There is one form of suffering with Christ which is in every man's reach—nay, in his very bosom—who has the root of the matter within him. It is referred to in the very Psalm that tells that "the Lord God is a sun and shield." It is expressed in these words: "My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!" There are no literal tabernacles of divine institution towards which we can set our hearts in strong desire as David did; but the feeling that led David in that channel dwells deeply in every mind that is kin with David. It is a craving for the manifestation of God and the delights of His worship. It is a hunger and a thirst after righteousness, as Jesus expresses it. Hunger and thirst are due to the absence of the objects of their desire. This is just the present condition of things spiritual. Famine prevails. The world is without God, whether we regard the vulgar masses or the high places of refined society. They are very busy, most of them, and tolerably honest and neighbourly (though not too much of that), but "God is not in all their thoughts." They desire not the knowledge of His ways. They, therefore, "lie in wickedness" according to the scriptural standard, which is the only standard in vogue with spiritual men. Wickedness, even in the grosser sense, is in the ascendant. Human aims, in all the walks of life, are governed by the lowest instincts. To selfish objects every high principle and noble consideration is sacrificed. Men everywhere labour with diligence, often unscrupulous as to means, so long as they keep out of the clutches of the law, for their own selfish behoof; and millions are trampled in the gutter, with blasphemy against God and the execration of man on their lips. The world is a great wilderness: a dry and parched land, wherein there is no water. There is a day coming when it will be said, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men . . . and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Of this tabernacle of glory in the future age, the tabernacle of Mosaic pitching was typical. David's heart on the type—ours on the antitype—join together from the same feeling, and say, "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts"; and from the same sense of present desolation we groan together, heart and flesh crying out for the living God. This made up the principal part of the sufferings of Christ. In the midst of much people, he was as a sparrow on the house-top—a pelican in the wilderness—alone in the surrounding desolation. This is an

experience that continues for every son of God. There are plenty of people, and plenty of activity, but neither the people nor what they are doing has any interest for those who are Christ's. In this respect we suffer with him, even if we are not the objects of direct persecution. We are not at liberty to unite with the present world as regards its aims and principles and pleasures. We do not belong to it if we belong to Christ ; for he expressly said, "I am not of this world," and he affirmed the same fact of his disciples, saying, "Ye are not of this world." There are some who say, "That was all very well for Christ and his apostles, but we are not Christ nor his apostles." Those who speak in this style give evidence that they are yet strangers and foreigners, and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel ; for the house of God is one, and the principle appertaining to one part belongs to all. John says, "He that saith he abideth in him, *ought himself also so to walk, EVEN AS HE WALKED*"; and Paul tells us as concerning his own case that he obtained mercy that Christ might set him forth "for a *pattern to them that should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting*" (1 Tim. 1 : 16). He also plainly commands us to be followers of him, as he was of Christ (1 Cor. 11 : 1). From this it will appear how unscriptural and dangerous is that style of talk which would seek to excuse modern believers from aiming at the standard exhibited in Christ and the apostles. There is no other saving standard. If we fail of this, we fail altogether : for it is by this we are to be tried. The standard men set up for themselves and one another, will be nowhere in the great day of judgment. They will vanish as the snow does before the heat. Men may comfort themselves now in measuring themselves by themselves, and by the wicked world outside ; but where will be their consolation when Christ refuses to try men by any rule but his own ?

Therefore it remains that the saints are not of this world. Their sentiment is the one expressed in the Psalm read : "I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." The world as at present constituted is, in the aggregate, "the tents of wickedness." It is founded on "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." It is, therefore, impossible that a man of God can be a dweller among them, or even be content to enjoy their recognition. The saints cannot be friends with the world. The world hated Christ, and it will hate his friends if they are so in deed and in truth. The world's friendship is a dangerous thing. Its countenance is almost certain death. A man may say, "I like it," but it is the old man that says that. The new man, who counts all things but dung that he may win Christ, would feel he was betraying Christ if he accepted recognition at the hands of those who despise God. What the old man likes is something to be on our guard against. The new man should be allowed to rule in all things. Nay, he *will* rule in the elect of God, for where he rules not, God's choice does not lie. Christ's words on this point are plain : "If any man serve me, let him follow me ; and where I am, there shall also my servant be." It is not sufficient that a man enrol himself as a servant ; he must be a servant in more than name if he is to be of any acceptance with the Father who sent Christ as one who served. He must "follow" Christ, and following him is doing as he did, in all the particulars he has indicated for our guidance. Preaching true doctrine is a part, but only a part of this service ; it largely

SEASONS OF COMFORT

includes righteous and benevolent deeds performed in the glory of Him from whom comes all power to perform deeds of any kind, and to whom, therefore, all glory belongs.

The way of life is narrow, because the life to be entered is glorious, and glorious by reason of the things that constitute the way narrow ; for where would be the glory of the future age if it were not for the righteousness that will be at its foundation, and the glory to God in the highest that will form its topstone of renown ? Immortality would be a creature delight, no doubt ; but divorced from its appointed co-ordinate of spotless righteousness, it would be like a precious stone in the dark. And in the wisdom of God, the foundation of all this righteousness and glory is being laid in these times of evil when the way of obedience is a way of self-mortification. Let us recognize the situation and act the part of wise men. The present order of things will not endure for ever. The trials we endure in the weakness of flesh and blood are but for a moment. They began only yesterday, and they will be all over tomorrow ; and what a morrow will that be, if we successfully fight this no uncertain fight, pressing towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus ! The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. Endowed with the immortal vigour of a new and imperishable body, and clad in the joyous vesture of cloudless wisdom and irrepressible thanksgiving and praise, we shall be invited to go forth on the work of reformation and blessing amongst millions of benighted men. First, the sword will clear the path, bringing down the power and abolishing the authority of kings in all the kingdoms of the world ; then the pouring wealth of the nations will come to the feet of Jehovah's kings and priests ; then the willing ears of countless multitudes will listen while the New Order of Governors teach them everywhere new laws, and uprear for them new and righteous institutions, by which all nations will be blessed, and the glory of Abraham's God set on high. Thenceforth in glory and honour and wealth, and greatness and joy and renown, the righteous will shine forth in the kingdom of their Father, a glorious galaxy of deathless benefactors, prepared in former days of trial and humiliation, but now exalted as the resplendent stars of the new heavens, and shining therein to the glory of Him who created them.

The Other Side of God's Character

Two sides to the divine character.—The severe side.—Condemnation of sin in the house of God.—The two commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets.—Religious exercises odious without these.—Obedience without the right intention.—A technical submission to the Gospel not enough.—Lacking the two commandments it is vain.—Israel's case our example.—Destructive effect of a Calvinistic theology.—Apostolic application of Israel's case.—The prophets a large source of practical guidance.—Salt without savour.—A faint desire to be saved.—The well-salted state.—No mistaking the example of Christ.—His relation to the world.—His case our standard.—The certain end.

It is an apostolic exhortation to "behold the goodness and severity of God." Both these sides of the divine character have to be recognized before we get a wholesome and scriptural view of Him with whom we have to do. Both are amply illustrated in the operations of nature, and in the historic doings of God with His people Israel. It is with the latter illustration we have more particularly to do on the present occasion. The chapter read from Isaiah (58) brings before us the severe side of God's character, and at the same time reminds us of some important lessons we are liable to forget, and upon the remembering and carrying out of which depends our ultimate individual acceptance with Him. The prophet is commanded to "cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show *my people* their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins." The prophet was not sent to the surrounding heathen to tell them of their sins, but to Israel—God's own people. Sin is by no means confined to those who know not God. The need for condemning sin exists as much, and in a certain sense, more, within the house of God than in the outer darkness. The outer darkness is insensible to appeal; wickedness is its normal condition, so to speak. It knows not God and cares for none of His ways, and reproof would be altogether objectless. But the house of God is professedly founded on submission to the expressed and enjoined will of God. And the people composing it are in danger of resting on this collective profession while individually acting inconsistently with it. Thus it was with Israel: "They seek me daily," says the Spirit of God by Isaiah, "and *delight to know my ways*, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God." They crowded the temple at the appointed times; they brought the sacrifices and kept the feasts, and took a certain delight in these things, but privately, they acted in opposition to the spirit on which the whole institution was founded. Jesus tells us what this spirit was. He says, "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for *this is the law and the prophets*" (Matt. 7:12). Or, as he on another occasion expressed it, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: *on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*" (Matt. 22:37-40). That is, the whole framework of the divine work on earth hitherto, owes its form to the need there is for these two principles obtaining the ascendancy. The whole object of the law and

SEASONS OF COMFORT

the whole end of the things revealed to the prophets is the establishment on earth of "Glory to God in the highest ; peace on earth, goodwill among men." In view of this, we can comprehend the odiousness in the Divine eyes of religious exercises devoid of the double-sided animating principle which is the very root and spirit of "pure religion and undefiled." Israel gloried in the temple, boasted of their law, attended with a certain delight on the divine institutions connected with them ; but they gave not God the glory ; they took it all to themselves, which is the universal weakness of human nature. Their boasting was carnal : their pride was a fleshy pride altogether as it is at this day : their satisfaction was with themselves. Therefore God took no pleasure in their approaches to Him. "To what purpose" saith He (Isaiah 1), "is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts . . . Bring no more vain oblations ; incense is an abomination unto me ; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with ; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and appointed feasts my soul hateth ; they are a trouble unto me: I am weary to bear them." Or again (Zech. 7 : 5), "When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh months . . . did ye at all fast unto me? When ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did ye not *eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?*"

So that as regards what Jesus declares to be "the first and great commandment," Israel's approaches to God were lacking of the one element which above all other makes God take pleasure in the worship of His people. With their lips they drew near : but *their heart* was far from Him. Consequently, their attendance at the temple and offering of their sacrifices, though actually required of them, were in vain. Their rendering of them was to an extent obedience, because they had been required, but it was obedience without the right intention. There was no intelligence of love towards God. It was salt without savour.

And as regards "the second commandment which is like unto it," their religious observances were equally devoid of the acceptable spirit. They were not controlled by a benevolent regard for their neighbour's case. "Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness . . . Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to *undo the heavy burdens*, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked that thou cover him ; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"

Now, is there no lesson for us in all these things? Doubtless there is. Paul tells us that these things were "written for our learning." And is it not plain as the noonday that like Israel, we may deceive ourselves as regards our standing towards God, if we content ourselves with a merely technical compliance with the instructions of the house of God? Is there no possibility that we may presume too much upon our knowledge of the truth, and our baptism, and our breaking of bread from week to week? These ways are divine, and in their right place indispensable ; but what if at the same time it is man more than God that is before our eyes in the doing of these things? What if we sing and pray merely as the right sort of thing to do without opening the heart to God in all sincerity and fervency and fear? What if

the glory of God be but a phrase on our lips, and a sentiment in reality foreign to our hearts? What if we shut up the bowels of our compassion towards those who suffer? What if with plenty in our hands, we think only of our own need, and our own comfort, and our schemes are shaped and burdened only and continually with our own cares and our own interests? What if we never help the heavy burdens under which so many around us are staggering to the grave? What if we practice a habit of absolute indifference to the yokes and the oppressions and difficulties which are crushing to the earth our neighbours on every hand.

Is it not obvious that, in that case, we are in the exact position of Israel, "delighting in Jehovah's ways" after a fashion, but to no profit, because He takes no pleasure in us? It is a frequent thing in the New Testament for reference to be made to the experiences of Israel as affording lessons for those who have come into the bond of the covenant through Christ in baptism. A Calvinistic and unscriptural theology has destroyed the force of all such allusions for the majority of persons; but it is our privilege to have been delivered from this as well as other corrupting forms of human tradition. Let us therefore seek to realize the full import of Israel's experiences as bearing on ourselves. Paul says (1 Cor. 10 : 6), the things that happened unto them were "our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. . . . All these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. *Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.*" This last sentence is the whole point of Paul's allusion to Israel in writing to the Corinthians. In writing to the Romans (11 : 20-22), he says something substantially the same: "Because of unbelief (the Jews) were broken off, and thou standest by faith. *Be not highminded, but fear*: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed *lest he also spare not thee*. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness: *if thou continue in his goodness*; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." Again, in writing to the Hebrews, he says (3 : 12 ; 4 : 1), "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God . . . for some (Israelites) *when they had heard did provoke* . . . So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. *Let us therefore fear*, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

With these apostolic instances before us, we see how warrantable and wholesome a thing it is to judge ourselves in the light of what God has said so largely in the prophets concerning Israel's position and behaviour before Him. From this source we shall be able to draw large supplies of practical guidance and instruction on points that even the New Testament may have left dim; and in this treatment of the prophetic Scriptures, we shall see new force in Paul's declaration that all scripture (by which he referred particularly to the prophets) given by inspiration of God, is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3 : 16).

Returning to the point which I introduced this to illustrate, it is very possible for us to be in the position of Israel. We may be zealous of the divine ordinances in the same way. We may have a liking for the Gospel

SEASONS OF COMFORT

theoretically ; we may attend and enjoy meetings ; and in a manner be as strongly in love with the Christadelphian position as the Jews were with their temple, and yet be lacking in the spiritual element that makes these things acceptable to God as part and parcel of a faithful service. They are good in their place ; divine in their place ; indispensable in their place : but if unaccompanied by the sentiment toward God which sincerely offers all to Him, and that disposition toward man which prompts to deeds of blessing and mercy, it may be all in vain, for on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets, and therefore, all the Gospel and all the meetings and the whole machinery of the divine service of our day. Therefore, what can we say more to the point than what Paul says ? “ Let us, therefore, fear.”

Jesus says, “ Salt is good : but if the salt have lost its saltness . . . it is thenceforth good for nothing but to be trodden under foot of men.” The connection in which he said this shows his meaning, and his meaning strengthens the idea before us. He was being followed by a large multitude of people (Luke 14 : 25). “ And he turned, and said unto them, If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. . . . Salt is good ; but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned ? It is neither fit for the land, not yet for the dunghill ” ; which was as much as to say, “ This coming after me is good, but not if it is disconnected from the state of mind which I require in my disciples.” This state of mind is the savour or saltness of the salt. The appropriateness of the simile must be apparent to all who have any experience of men in spiritual things. The man of spiritual understanding in whom this understanding has developed spiritual affection or a decided, pronounced, and fervent affinity for the things of God, in all their relations and manifestations, is a man of saltness, pleasant to the taste. But how often it is that with a knowledge of the truth, there has failed to come the loving espousal of divine views of men and things. The man knows the Gospel intellectually and has a faint desire to be saved, but his affections are with the thoughts, ways, aims, movements, men and things of the present evil world. There is no fervent submission to God ; no adequate appreciation of Christ. Dull and irresponsive to spiritual things, he is quick, active, intelligent and enterprising in all directions of self-interest. The salt is there in the profession of discipleship, but it is a mere powder without taste, of no use for the King’s table.

The great object of the Gospel is to bring men into the well-salted state in which their relation to God is a very thorough, hearty, pronounced and uncompromising thing. Christ is the illustration of what is wanted. He is the first-born among many brethren, to whom all the rest are pre-required to be conformed as to the likeness of an image. Now there is no mistaking his case, and we are in no danger of going beyond him. He declared in simple but expressive terms, “ I am not of this world,” and his whole course illustrates the meaning of the language. He stood aloof from men in so far as they stood away from the divine foundation. He took no part in their movements, patriotic or otherwise. The duties of citizenship he discharged passively, as in the case of paying taxes. His attitude towards the world was that of protest and dissociation. He “ testified of it that the

works thereof were evil," by which he earned hatred and destruction. He had no apologies or spare sympathy for the enemies of God. He pursued a perfectly independent course, as insensible to the censure of the world as he was above their favour. He never took public opinion or public criticism into account. His one simple aim was to do the will of Him who had sent him—a will utterly inconsistent with popularity and favour.

Now his testimony concerning his disciples is, that their part is to try to follow in the course he has pursued before them. "I have given you an example." "Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." "It is sufficient for the disciple that he be as his Master." "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." "Ye cannot serve God and mammon." "No man is worthy of me who loves himself or his friends more than me." Consequently, there is no room for the contention of those who are fain to think that Christ's case is no standard for us to go by. Christ's case is the standard, and the only standard: and those who speak of it as too high are speaking against the word. There will be no other standard in the great day of Christ which will shortly come upon us all. The so-called "churches" have so lowered and bedraggled the Gospel in the mire of human sentiment, that it has become almost constitutionally difficult with many to receive the truth on this point. Well, there were disciples in Christ's own day who, when they heard him on certain topics, said, "This a hard saying; who can hear it?" and from that day, turned back and walked no more with him. It is not wonderful, if in our deserted day, there should be a similar resistance to the claims of the Eternal Spirit, speaking in the holy oracles. It will be found at last a terrible thing to fight against God. The only course of sane men is to receive and follow Christ without the least reservation, regardless of disadvantage to themselves or misconception on the part of others, knowing that it is written, "Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit their souls unto him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator." They cannot do more than lose their life for Christ; and thousands have done this before them, concerning whom Christ says they shall be saved in the day of his power, when all merely human hopes and schemes and honours will be wrecked for evermore.

Obedience

Paul's letters models.—Purity before peace.—The comfort of saintship in Christ.—The command to be kind to the unthankful.—Disobeyed on specious pretexts.—Pleasant duties and the reverse.—The unpleasant duties must be borne.—Evil times the saint's opportunity.—Christ alone in the midst of company.—Submission to evil not a finality.—Probationary merely.—The comforting results afterwards.—The crown after the cross.—Meanwhile the cross to be borne.—Young Dorcas.—Intellectual disciples.—Many ways of bearing the cross.

2 CORINTHIANS I.—These letters of Paul, brethren and sisters, are excellent models. I do not think we can do better in writing or speaking than to be practically followers of Paul as he was a follower of Christ. How excellent a beginning he makes of this second letter to the Corinthians. After stating whom the letter is from and to whom it is addressed, he salutes the latter thus: "Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ." There is great sweetness about that salutation. It is not an empty form of words; it is a genuine wish on the part of Paul, that grace or favour might rest on those to whom he was writing, and that peace might remain with them; peace from two sources which are yet one—God the Father, the Creator, the supreme head of the universe, and the Lord Jesus, who is the appointed channel of His dealings with our fallen race; peace outflowing from them in the tranquillizing influence of divine favour; a real peace which none can invade; as saith the scripture, "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only?" (Job 34 : 29).

There was, of course, another element in Paul's good wishes; an unexpressed principle underlying his benediction, which we do well to recognize, that, namely, expressed in the saying of James, "**FIRST PURE, then peaceable.**" His wishes for their peace were based on the fact that they were a community of men and women walking in obedience to the apostolic commandments; built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets; men and women of pure hearts and pure lives—purity of thought, purity of action, purity of intention, purity of aspiration; a prevailing purity engendered by the knowledge of God, and faith in His glorious promises, and love of the Lord Jesus as the centre of those promises. Now as believers of the Gospel we occupy a similar position to the Corinthians, and we may venture this morning, as on all mornings on which we assemble round the table, to take to ourselves the peace which Paul desired to rest upon them; and which he would no doubt desire us to have, if he were writing to us. But whilst looking at the sweetness, let us also look at the purity. Jesus says, "Ye are clean through the word spoken to you"; but we may know the words and not be clean by them. If those words fail to produce purity, they fail in their effect, and that is what we have to consider on a Sunday morning. We come together on such an occasion as sons of God, and we have to be reminded of our position. We do not assemble in the same capacity as

when we come together to present the truth to the hearing of the public. We have no need of argument as to our position in nature, and God's purposed goodness, inasmuch as we all humbly recognize the standard to which we stand related. We believe in the Lord and have submitted to His yoke, and are here while looking at the favour of our position, to realize the duties it brings with it. We are not called upon to afflict ourselves too much, though there is less danger of our doing that than of our afflicting ourselves too little. There is great danger that people may not afflict themselves enough ; may not judge themselves sufficiently in the sight of God. Yet let us not run into the excess of some, and deprive ourselves of the true comfort of our position as heirs of the grace of life. Some have been unduly weighed to the earth by a sense of their insufficiency, and have failed to be supported by those comforting thoughts that spring from the faith of God. Paul says to such, "Lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees ; make straight paths for your feet." He also says, "Comfort the feeble minded ; support the weak." Let there be comfort where there is purity ; repentance and supplication where there is failure. If there is no purity—if there is disobedience, let there be no comfort ; let there be affliction, and mourning, and weeping, and refusal to lay hold of the joys of the truth until the purity comes. As James says, "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners ; and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep : let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness." But if we have the answer of a good conscience ; if we know that we are walking in the way Christ has marked out for us, in the many commandments he has given, entering minutely into all the duties of life—then we may take to ourselves comfort.

There is one commandment I should like to mention—a commandment having relation to many others, and one which Christ repeats several times and in various ways : "Be kind to the unthankful and the evil" ; and which he also puts into another form : "Whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister . . . even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." And again, "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted ; but whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased." In this he points to his own example, saying, "If I, your Lord and Master, take such an attitude, much more may ye." That is a distinct and imperative commandment—as much so as baptism ; and the reason why it is necessary to emphasize it is, that we are so liable to overlook and act in opposition to it—it goes so much against the grain of the natural man. The commandments not to steal, not to lie, not to commit fornication, are such as a man's own sense of honour would help him to abide by : but to be kind to the unthankful and the evil is something opposed to all natural feeling, and contrary to the moral philosophy of the world. There is nothing more usual than to hear persons justifying unkindness on the ground that the object of it is unworthy. Some one is in need : the need is not denied, but it is said that the man is undeserving, and this is accepted as a reason why assistance should be refused. Some one asks a favour who has proved ungracious in former transactions, and this is made the ground of refusal. Some one is ill, who in health was savourless, useless, and perhaps hurtful ; and goodness is denied on this ground. A complaining widow is neglected because she refreshes not the soul. These things ought not so to be. We are in such

SEASONS OF COMFORT

matters to act from allegiance to Christ, and not from our own tastes. We are to minister because he has commanded us so to do, and not because it is sweet to do it. It is our discipline, and though oft-times bitter, sweetness will come even now from being kind to "the unthankful and the evil."

There are some people who do not go anywhere unless they can obtain enjoyment; they have always open mouths in a mental sense. They will go where they can drink. They will go where they can be entertained. They will visit people who are in health and prosperity. They will do kindness to the thankful and the good, invite friends able to invite them again. There are not many who visit where they can get no gratification beyond that which comes from obeying the commandments of Christ, to visit the fatherless and the widow in their affliction. There are not many who bestow their kindness upon the repulsive; there are not many who call to their feasts the poor, and the halt, and the maimed, and the blind, who can give no recompense; and yet none others are Christ's true servants. Jesus says, "Why call ye me Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Let us remember this. It is not sufficient to hear the truth and like it. There are many who sit and listen with pleasure to the beautiful sentiments of the Gospel, to whom the words spoken to Ezekiel are applicable (33 : 32) : "Lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument : for they hear thy words, but they do them not." You will not forget that Jesus likens this class ("who hear these sayings of mine and do them not") to men building their houses on the sand, which when the rains descend, and the floods come, and the winds blow, fall with great ruin (Matt. 7 : 26). If, therefore, we are to be associated with Jesus, and the glorious band that constitute the kingdom of God, we must distinguish ourselves by the present and actual performance of his commandments.

Some people are always more or less regretting the dearth of the time in which their lot is cast. They feel like David when he says, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God." "My flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." This is a natural and legitimate sentiment, but the situation is not purely a misfortune. There is another side to the question. These evil times bring with them our opportunity. If there were no unthankful people, if we were not placed in relation to evil people, and if all things around were spiritually prosperous and refreshing, what opportunity should we have of carrying out the commandments of Christ, which expressly pre-suppose the existence of surrounding evil conditions? If all were sweet and plentiful, we should be bemoaning ourselves that we had no opportunity of being tried whether we should keep his commandments or not. I have seen this very sentiment in another form : I have heard brethren and sisters who had a strong wish to do something in the service of Christ. I have heard them speak as if at a loss what to do. If such would just bethink themselves, they would find that this present evil gives the opportunity they profess to desire; and would be enabled to make a very good use of the situation. Out of every evil would come good. They would be very much enabled to endure; for it would fall to them to consider that all the accepted of God have had to live alone as it were. Take Lot in Sodom; Moses in the unbelieving congregation which fell in the wilderness; the Lord Jesus who, although

surrounded by disciples, was, in one sense, called upon in solitude to endure the contradiction of sinners against himself ; he was not appreciated even by his friends—they could not rise to his great height. They looked merely on the outward aspect of his mission. The crowds that rushed to see the wonderful works he performed, were attracted by the prospect of temporal benefit. So he poured cold water on their enthusiasm when he said : “ If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.” He had to go on his solitary way, for the joy set before, enduring the cross. Take that view, and you will be greatly strengthened. Remember that all this submission to evil is but probationary. It is not in human nature to accept it as a finality. Without some assurance of the comfort of God, it would be too much to bear. God does not wish us to bear otherwise than as Jesus bore it, who for the joy set before him despised the shame. Therefore we are warranted in looking at the beautiful idea contained in the words of Paul : “ Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.” After which come those equally beautiful words, “ Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort ; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” Paul’s sufferings were pre-eminently the sufferings of Christ, and the sufferings of the Corinthians were indirectly the sufferings of Christ. Just as Paul was poor and unpopular as the result of the course he pursued, so were they as the result of identifying themselves with him ; therefore they shared the sufferings of Christ, and we have to do likewise. We have to accept unpopularity and the imputation of madness, and many other disagreeables incident to such a position as ours, if we are faithful to the truth. But if the sufferings of Christ abounded in the Corinthians, so also did the consolation. What is the consolation of Christ ? It is that referred to by Christ himself when he said, “ Blessed are ye that mourn : *for ye shall be comforted.*” It is a future comfort as the subject of a present contemplation. Christ’s joy, Christ’s consolation is ours, if Christ’s sufferings are ours ; for when the time comes to develop the result of all the sufferings and the trials, he asks his servants to “ enter into the joy of their Lord.” “ He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied.” He shall see a glorious state of things established as the result of his travail, when there shall spring from the earth an immortal generation ascribing their victory over death to him. He will see a very different state of things from that in which he lived when he was the scorn of the Pharisees. All the joy and riches, the life and the honour of the earth will be his ; and when that comes to pass the sufferings that God appointed for him will be looked back to as the means of bringing it all about. And we shall have a share in the glory if we fellowship the sufferings of Christ now. The cross now ; the crown then. We must make up our minds to the things that are required ; we must make up our minds to the self-denial. We must make up our minds to forgo many things that are in themselves legitimate, but hindrances in the race. We must lay aside every weight ; giving all diligence to make our calling and election sure.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Young women called to the race will refrain from ornamental trifling, and consecrate the hours thus wasted in the production of mere trinkets, redeeming the time, knowing that the days are evil. They will rather turn Dorcases, spending their leisure time in making clothing for the poor, or in some other occupation of goodness. Men of high calling will leave the engrossments of merely literary or scientific or any other kind of life apart from the Gospel, which, though interesting in some respects, has a tendency to take up all the time and absorb all the mind, and which when life is gone, is worth nothing at all. There will be plenty of time for intellectual sweets, when we have attained to life eternal. To gain this, we have now to neglect many other things. We have to choose the disagreeable. We are not fools in doing so. A man will always choose the disagreeable if he sees something good at the end ; a man will go down into a mine and endure darkness, and fatigue, and danger, if he thinks it will enrich him for the rest of his life. And a person who sees in his mind's eye, CHRIST, THE FUTURE RULER AND POSSESSOR OF THE WORLD, will be very glad to share in the sufferings of Christ in this present time ; knowing that this is extracted as one of the conditions of participating in the glory to be revealed. There are many ways of sharing in the sufferings of Christ. Let each one choose the way next to him ; let it not be slothfully done, for Christ will approve no slothful servant. Let it not be our aim to make and keep ourselves comfortable ; but to do his work and help his need. He can be assisted in an abundance of ways. The honour of his name, the interests of his truth, the well-being of his people, present us many opportunities of writing an account that we shall not be ashamed to confront in the day of reckoning. While, then, we comfort ourselves, let us be quite sure we are entitled to the comfort, by obedience ; first, by purity in all things, and second, by seeking out and performing the Master's will in all things, and occupying ourselves in the execution of it. And let us make up our minds that this will not always be necessarily agreeable. Sometimes it will be exceedingly otherwise ; occasionally there will be a little uprush of the true nectar of heaven from the bottom of the spring around which we are working, but at most times it will be hard, and trying, and toilsome work. Then we are not to lose confidence because we sometimes lack joy. The truth is calculated to impart joy, but the absence of joy is no necessary indication of the absence of favour in his sight ; for if we take David and Jesus, we find them both overborne with suffering. Take the Psalms of David ; see how much they have to do with sleepless pillows, and Christ himself was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Therefore we must not conclude that, because we do not see the sun all the time, God is not smiling upon us. We may do well and suffer. The principle remains good : " If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted ? " That was said to Cain, and is said to every servant of Christ. " But if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door." Gladness in that case is of no use ; the gladness of the transgressor will turn to weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth in the day of Christ's glory.

Consolation

Paul's desire that believers might be comforted.—The nature of the comfort.—The coming goodness.—Present fellowship.—Few with whom it can be enjoyed.—Love an element of comfort.—Faith and hope abortive without it.—The "love" of popular talk not the love of apostolic discourse.—Its basis, identity of the enthusiastic convictions in the truth.—The knowledge of the truth and general intelligence not the same.—The mystery of godliness.—Its recognition a necessity of full assurance of understanding.—The natural man's view of Christ.—The apostolic warning against philosophy and Judaism.—The "enticing" nature of the lie propounded by both systems.—Christ the focalization of the divine purpose towards man.—No hope in any other direction.—In Christ all power.—The end of the philosophy and the Judaizers.—The wise and their choice.—Christ cannot be put too high.

COLOSSIANS 2.—Paul here expresses the nature of the anxiety he entertained with regard to the brethren at Colosse, Laodicea, and elsewhere, and thereby causes us to understand what he would have desired concerning us had he been alive now ; and therefore what we ought to strive to attain as regards spiritual condition. He desires "that their hearts might be comforted." This is a supremely desirable condition. It is not to be realized perfectly till he comes who will "comfort all" that mourn, when those who "weep now" with a "godly weeping," "shall be comforted." Yet, a degree of it is attainable even in the dreariness of our pilgrimage. Paul speaks of being comforted in all his tribulation (2 Cor. 1 : 4). This comfort he derived from two sources. The main source he indicates thus : "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ." The knowledge that Christ is with the Father as our Friend, living for ever while all is change and death around us, and that he is coming again at the appointed time to deliver us from the weakness of this corruptible, and give us a place in the glorious society of the perfected sons of God, is a continual comfort in this valley of the shadow of death. On this, indeed, we must rely as the supreme comfort ; for all others may fail. The other comfort that Paul experienced he describes in Rom. 1 : 12, as "being comforted together with the mutual faith" of himself and the brethren. This also is a great and thrilling comfort, but rarely attainable in our day on account of the scarcity of real faith. Friendly people are to be met with ; people interested in your personal concerns, or the workings of the truth in an ecclesiastical sense : but where are those whose hearts, emancipated from the pettiness of this provisional life, are occupied with a genuine appreciation of the great things that are of God, and filled with hopes, and sighs, and prayers ? They are here and there ; their name is not legion. You do not necessarily find them where people profess the name of Christadelphians ; but, thank God, they are on the increase. They were naturally more numerous in Paul's day, on account of the powerful means employed in the sowing of the good seed ; though even then, Paul had to lament that "all seek their own, and not the things that are Jesus Christ's" (Phil. 2 : 21). No marvel if this lament should have a tenfold force in this

SEASONS OF COMFORT

cloudy and dark day. To discern the truth, and be able to define it, is one thing : but to set about the service of it and those connected with it, in the spirit of self-sacrifice, is another and a scarcer thing, and yet the only thing that will stand in the day of trial ; for the Great President at that trial has said : “ He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it : and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it ” (Matt. 10 : 38, 39).

The foundation or cause of the comfort in one another, that Paul desired the brethren to realize, is thus expressed by him : “ Being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.” Love is an indispensable element in mutual comfort. Faith and hope are refreshing to behold—so much so, indeed, in these barren days, that we can love intensely where they are manifested, even if they are unaccompanied by the manifestation of benevolence. But the truly joyful and love-evoking combination is where the greatest of the three stands high in the centre of the group, and faith and hope stand obediently at each side. This love will flourish when faith and hope are swallowed up in the glories of God’s realized purpose. Faith and hope are greatly marred if love stands not with them. A pugilistic and cantankerous faith, scarcely supported by a hope at all, and which has chased away the leading beauty of the group, is an abomination. A man with neither faith, hope, nor love, is an insipid being indeed (and there are many such), a tree twice dead and plucked up by the roots.

That which is commonly talked about as “love,” is not the apostolic “love.” The popular love consists of an emasculated mind and honeyed words. The apostolic “knitting together in love” is on the goodly foundation of “*all riches of the full assurance of UNDERSTANDING.*” It is a love springing from identical convictions—a common love resulting from a common enlightenment ; a mutual affection spontaneously generated by unity of knowledge and judgment, and this not in the scanty form of “opinion,” or the cold uncertainty of “views,” but in the richness of a positive and pronounced “assurance of understanding” : enthusiastic convictions if you will, without which there can be no true discipleship of Christ. This is a state of mind that stops not short at “good words and fair speeches,” but shows its faith by “works,” without which, a man, whatever his knowledge and understanding, or ability to speak with even higher than human tongues, is “as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” There be many fig trees fair and promising to look upon, which, when the Master comes to inspect them and finds nothing but leaves, will wither up before his destroying curse.

The “full assurance of understanding” in which brethren are knit together is, of course, something higher than general intelligence. What is known as “general intelligence,” will do nothing for a man as regards redeeming him from the power of the grave. “General intelligence” will land a man among the worms at last, and leave him in their everlasting company. The “understanding” that delivers from death, in full assurance thereof, is that of which John speaks when he says, “The Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, *that we may know him that is true*” (1 John 5 : 20). It is the knowledge of God that redeems, as Jesus

saith : " This is life eternal, *that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent* " (John 17 : 3). It is those that know not God that are to be punished with everlasting destruction at the revelation of Jesus (2 Thess. 1 : 9). Paul is in harmony with all this when he speaks of " the full assurance of understanding," for he defines the operation of it in this way : " *To the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ.*" To " know him that is true," in the apostolic age, was to acknowledge " the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit " (1 Tim. 3 : 16). Any " full assurance of understanding " that came short of the acknowledgment of this mystery was a full assurance of mis-understanding or non-understanding. What was this " mystery of God " ? An amended translation would make it more apparent than it is in the common version. It should read : " The mystery of God, *even of the Father, and of Christ.*" That is, the " mystery " comprehends the Father and Christ as the items of its constitution. As Paul elsewhere by the Spirit defines it : " *God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself*" (2 Cor. 5 : 19). Or as Jesus declared it : " *Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? . . . He that hath seen me hath seen the Father* " (John 14 : 10, 9). Or the testimony of John : " *The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us* " (John 1 : 14).

The mystery of God presented for the recognition of the world in Paul's day, was that the man crucified by Pontius Pilate, at the instigation of the Jews, was no mere man, but the manifestation of the Creator of heaven and earth by the Spirit, in the seed of David according to the flesh, for the condemnation of ancestral sin in the flesh, that the Father might be just in justifying those who should believe in the crucified one (Rom. 3 : 26) ; that the praise might be *of God* and not of men (2 Cor. 4 : 7). This *was* a " mystery," whether as regards its own nature or its place in the divine plan of working. It was a thing not to be comprehended, as men comprehend common things, that God should veil Himself in a man ; yet it was the solution of the other mystery, how God was to save a condemned race consistently with his own unchangeable methods. The acknowledgment of this mystery will always come with a full assurance of understanding. There were some in Paul's day who lacked this understanding. Their mode of thought in the case is described by Jesus as a " judging after the flesh " (John 8 : 15) ; that is, a making of their experience of this earthly nature the measure of their conceptions of the workings of God in relation thereto, as though God, who created this corruptible, had no higher ways than are known to them " as natural brute beasts." The judging by this rule developed the class who " denied the Lord that bought them," in saying that Christ was a mere man, thus denying his name Emmanuel (God with us), and enunciating what Peter styles " damnable heresy." We must beware of " judging after the flesh." We must be careful to " acknowledge the mystery of God, even of the Father, and of Christ," remembering the words of warning uttered by the apostle John : " *Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son* " (2 John 9).

" Wherein," says Paul, " are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Why does he say this ? He answers : " This I say lest any

SEASONS OF COMFORT

man beguile you with enticing words." This shows that "enticing words" were being employed to draw the views of the brethren in a contrary direction. What was the character of these enticing words? We gather it from the words almost immediately following: "Beware lest any man spoil you *through philosophy and vain deceit*, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ" (verse 8). Here were two classes of teaching, "philosophy" (the tradition of men), with which the Colossians, as Greeks, were surrounded; and Judaizing (the rudiments or elements of the world). Both these turned away from Christ, as we see in our own days. The words in which they did so were "enticing" or pleasant words: "good words and fair speeches which deceived the hearts of the simple," as it is at this day. Philosophy taught that all men were equally important by reason of their participation in a common divinity, and that to direct attention to one in particular, as the Gospel did to Christ, was absurd and unphilosophical—that Christ was all very well in his own place as a remarkable moral hero, but that to exalt him to the position of a fellow of the Creator, and assign him supremacy over men, to whom every knee must bow, and to make human salvation dependent in every case upon his goodwill, was the outrageous freak of an over-heated enthusiasm. This was flattering to human vanity, and greatly liable to "spoil" those who gave ear to the enticing words. Judaism, on the other hand, contended that as the law of Moses was divine, and had been the glory of Israel for ages, it could not be superseded, and that any goodness that appertained to the doctrine of the Nazarene had been borrowed from it, nay more, stolen from it, and made the basis of blasphemous pretences on the part of an unlearned Jew of Nazareth, who, even if he rose from the dead, could never be admitted to come into competition with what God spake by Moses.

Against both classes of enticing words Paul places the declaration that "in Christ dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." This fact is the foundation of his antagonism to the "enticing words." Facts are facts, and no amount of fine argument could displace from Paul's mind, or allow him to tolerate the attempt to displace from the minds of the brethren the fact, that (mystery though it may seem) in Christ is personally focalized, by the indwelling of the Deity, all power and goodness, law and wisdom, in relation to the human race. Plainly enough do we see that "philosophy" is a broken cistern, holding no water; for where is there hope in any of the contrivances of man? He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not. Generation follows generation to the grave, and who can bring them from thence? Well may we say, with Paul, as we stand in the silent graveyard, Westminster Abbey though it be, with the ashes of the "illustrious" dead all around, "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" Yes; the wisdom of man can do nothing for him when he lies down as food for the worms. The living may admire the dead, and fill their heads with their traditions left behind in the "many books" of the making of which there is no end; but their own turns will come, and they too must go to the generation of their fathers, never to see light; for "man that is in honour, and understandeth not (the wisdom of God), is like the beasts that perish" (Psa. 49: 19, 20).

But Jesus Christ lives. He is the same yesterday, today, and for ever (Heb. 13 : 8). To him is all power committed in heaven and in earth (Matt. 28 : 18), power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as the Father gives him (John 17 : 2). His command is all that is needed to reorganize the ashes of the sleepers : for creative power is in him. The dead shall hear his voice and shall come forth. The Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son (John 5 : 22). He has but to say, "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust" (Isa. 26 : 19), and "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake" (Dan. 12 : 2). He has the keys of the grave and death (Rev. 1 : 18). He will use them on the prison doors of his brethren, and these, he tells us, are those who do the will of the Father (Matt. 12 : 50) ; and this is the will of the Father, "that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John 6 : 29), and "do whatsoever I command" (John 15 : 14).

Let us beware, then, of "enticing words," which would turn from the simplicity that is in Christ, the fountain of living waters.

And how much better off are those who, in Paul's day, made acceptance turn on meats and drinks, and new moons, and holy days ? Let the desolations of the past eighteen centuries testify. Israel wanders without hope. God has not given them eyes to see that the law was but a shadow of good things to come, that the body (or substance) is of Christ, in whom all the good things typified are and will be realized. Blindness in part is happened unto Israel. A remnant in the apostolic era were wise enough to understand that, through them (including Paul), we Gentiles are privileged to see clearly. Let us remember that we stand by faith, and that if we use not our position in all humility, and diligence and obedience, and prayer, we shall be plucked out of our place in the good olive tree, and cast amongst the withered branches to be burnt.

We cannot put Christ too high. God hath given him a name above every name, even His own name, the name of God, which shortly cometh from far. He is the Way, the Truth, the Life, the Resurrection, the Hope. He is the Head ; the beginning of the creation of God, the first-born of every creature, Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Lord Almighty (Rev. 1 : 8, 11, 17). His name shall endure for ever. The earth shall at the last and for evermore be filled with His glory, when the institutions and the pomp, and the pride, and the theories of men shall for ever have disappeared from below the sun. Let us, then, give good heed to the apostolic warning. If we nurse defective, not to say degrading, views of the greatness of Christ, we shall be unfitted to participate in the song of his renown, or fill an acceptable place in his service when he comes to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.

Letter to Philemon

Model of letter writing.—Ways of the old man.—The Apostles our standard, our brethren.—Loving expressions, and cant.—Endearments belonging to the truth.—Epistolary salutation.—Paul's gratitude.—Modern self-esteem.—Nominal brethren.—A man of love with love undrawn out.—How we may know whether we love.—True well-doing more than correctness.—Spiritual horticulture.—Onesimus' enlightenment.—Paul not dictatorial, but persuasive, supplicatory.—Followers of Paul.—The popular praise of virtue and condemnation of selfishness in the abstract.—The well-doing prescribed by the King.

PHILEMON.—This letter of Paul's differs from the rest of the epistles in being a private communication on a private matter, affecting only the brother to whom principally it was sent. It is none the less, however, instructive to those who seek to be "followers of Paul as he was of Christ." It is a model of letter-writing as it ought to be among brethren. A right mode of intercourse is one of the many things we have to learn on being called "out of darkness into the marvellous light" of God. We are too apt to rest content with a change of view; we are too apt to stop short in the process which, rightly worked out, ends in a "new creature." It is a time before we take on the new man in his entirety. The ways of the old man linger with us in thought, speech, and (too often) in action. The heartless (and even slang) talk of a world living in wickedness; or the chilling propriety of polite letter-writing, which deals, like "science," with external things only, and knows nothing of the noble warmth that comes from the First Cause, who is love, and whose family is in training for His likeness—sometimes remains like scarcely-thawed ice under a winter sun, disfiguring and obstructing the development of the life which the truth is designed to create in the poor shivering servants of sin.

Now we must take our cue in this, as in all other matters, from apostolic example. We must not be led away with the idea that the apostles occupied a sphere too high for us to attain. If we hope to be with them in the day of the manifestation of the sons of God, we must strive to conform to their thoughts and ways, in these, our days of the prophecy and the tribulation. They have commanded us to imitate them: "even as ye have us (the apostles) for an example" (Phil. 3 : 17); and this command we must obey, if we desire to stand right in the day when popular sentiment and popular usage in such things will disappear as completely as mist before the rising of the sun. The apostles are our brethren. Their being called "apostles" simply signifies that they were specially sent (from *apostolos*, one sent). Their speciality lay in the message they had to deliver; it did not lie in the principles or practices required of them. These principles and practices (commanded by Christ) are of common obligation among all their fellow-heirs unto eternal life. They are exhibited in the apostles as patterns for our imitation.

Now in the case in question, we find Paul, in the capacity of a private letter-writer, describing Philemon as his "dearly beloved, and fellow-

labourer"; Apphia as his "beloved"; and Archippus as his "fellow-soldier." Doubtless, there is in our day a great deal of hypocritical cant in the use of friendly phrases; this may have had the effect of toning down the cordiality of true men, who abhor effeminate sanctimony, but it is no reason why they should discard the genuine article. There is a great and always perceptible difference between the parroting of friendly forms of speech and the genuine use of these as the channels of a real friendship in Christ. Therefore, the existence of the one need not exclude the other. Nay, we may go further, and say that the genuine cannot be excluded. Where a friendship of the apostolic type, having its foundation in God, truly exists, it will show itself in its own way as inevitably as the love of the sexes. Let the love of the brethren have its free course. Let us not be afraid to call them "beloved," and "dearly beloved," and "fellow-labourers," if they be so. By all means let us eschew a hackneyed or stereotyped phraseology, which is as lifeless as the rattle of a Papist's beads; but let us not on principle steer clear of endearments. They belong to the truth, and the truth has scarcely got hold of us if we feel them not. Let us not say "dearly beloved" if we feel not so; let us not salute another as a "fellow-labourer" if he be not so. Let all our words be built in truth; but let us not rob ourselves or our brethren of the sweetness and the edification that comes from a frank and childlike declaration of the glorious love that grows from the truth.

"Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." This is Paul's opening salutation in his letter. Should such a salutation always be absent from the letters of his nineteenth century brethren? Thank God, these words of purest blessing are not unknown among the brethren; but they are not yet so common as—in the will of God—the truth may make them. Do we advocate a stereotyped form? By no means. They are not stereotyped in Paul's letters, though very nearly so. We advocate conformity to the spirit of the thing. In some form or other, Paul always invokes the blessing of the Father and of the Lord on those to whom he writes in love. It is not difficult to see that this is a good thing. It is an exercise in true godliness every time it is done. It unbends the mind to the attitude of suppliancy and benevolence, which we always ought to occupy. It brings with it to our own mind a recognition of God's relation to all our matters, in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways. It sheds the right influence on those to whom we may address ourselves. It brings before them great facts to which a mere attention to business is apt to make us oblivious. Finally, and most consequently, does it not command the divine approbation and blessing? Is there no such thing as "Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ"? Are these empty words? If they are, let us not use them. But if they are not—if God does extend favour, and shed mercy, and give peace to His children even now—comforting them in all the tribulations that they may endure; and if Christ as the mediator does take part in this actual, invisible, and gracious work—are we not robbing ourselves, and our brethren, and our Master, and our God, in missing our many opportunities of invocation?

Paul says he "thanked God, making mention of Philemon always in his prayers." In this frank allusion to the subject-matter of his private

SEASONS OF COMFORT

petitions, we have insight into another feature, which deserves our notice and imitation. Paul was not above thanking God for a worthy fellow-labourer, and letting him know it. In our dry, democratic days, this fruit of the Spirit is nearly extinct. A universal self-esteem kills generous gratitude in the birth, and fears to lose its own exaltation by even implied appreciation of another's worth. This is an obstinate shrub of the desert, which must be cut down to make way for the lovely flowers of Eden, which delight the eye and regale the senses with their fragrance. But when will the cutting-down be? Well, in some cases it will take place now, under the exhortation to "mortify" and "crucify" all the characteristics of the old man of the flesh. It is better to apply the knife ourselves. If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.

Paul, however, did not thank God for Philemon merely because he was a brother. This is sometimes not a cause for thanksgiving: for there are many who, we may thank God, are not brethren, because of the disgrace, and hindrance that would come from their being so: and there are some concerning whose brotherhood we cannot be thankful, because, like those of whom Paul speaks in another place, though professing godliness, they are destitute of the power thereof, and are enemies of the cross of Christ, though bearing the name of friends. What made Paul thankful was this: "*Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast TOWARD THE LORD JESUS, and toward all saints.*" Such a condition in any professor will certainly inspire thanksgiving in any brother to whom, like Paul, "to live is Christ." It is an unerring law that "every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him" (1 John 5: 1). A man whose sympathies are toward God and the Lord Jesus will, without fail, have his love drawn out by those symptoms in another, which show he has been begotten by the word of truth (James 1: 18). So decided and unmistakable is the operation of this law, that John says, "*By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments*" (1 John 5: 2). A brother among the children of Sodom, whether these bear the name or not, might have the experience of Lot, "whose righteous soul was vexed from day to day." His love would not be drawn out. His soul would be stirred within him disagreeably, in accordance with the characteristic of divinely approved men who "cannot bear them that are evil" (Rev. 2: 2), and despise vile men, honouring them that fear the Lord (Psa. 15: 4); but, by John's rule, he would be able to comfort himself in the drought and in bitterness. He knows within himself that God is his chief delight, and the commandments of God the subject of his supreme regard. He can therefore say to himself, "Though my antipathies are stirred; though my soul eats in bitterness: though my love is rarely called out, I know that I love the children of God, because I love God and keep His commandments. I have only to meet them to have my soul awakened to the fulness of love, and borne aloft with exceeding joy."

"We have great joy and consolation in thy love," says Paul to Philemon, "because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother." Paul's satisfaction on Philemon's account arose from Philemon's spontaneous well-doing—not well-doing in the limited sense of correctness of conduct, which in many cases is but a refined kind of selfishness; but well-doing in the sense of doing good to others. There is no more consoling

manifestation than this—to see a brother refreshing the saints, comforting, sustaining, helping, gladdening them in the things of the Lord. There are those who discourage, pull down, hinder and distress by their hyper-criticism and unwise pugnacity, and others by their evil deeds.

Others there are whose influence is simply neutral, which is better than mischievous, and some who are neutral think they are of Philemon's stamp—refreshing to the saints : but the latter are the judges. No man can testify of himself. The fruit is known by its taste ; and the fruit depends upon the seed and the soil it is grown in. Let every man enrich his ground with self crucifixion, and plant carefully the seed of the Word, and water well with prayer and daily reading, watching, and plucking the weeds ; the fruit will then be pleasant to the taste of all who eat. Without this training, nature's rank growth will come up in its wild profusion ; and for a paradise of God, there will be a garden of weeds.

The way Paul introduces and disposes of the private business that required him to write this letter to Philemon, is eloquent in lessons of courtesy and kindness. While he was a prisoner at Rome, a certain runaway slave named Onesimus came into contact with Paul, probably through being detained as a suspected runaway in the same prison. At all events the result of the contact was that Onesimus received the truth ; and the question may be understood to have come up between them, " What, in the altered circumstances, was the duty of Onesimus towards Philemon, his master, from whom he had fled ? " We can easily imagine Paul advising him to return, and offering to give him a letter of introduction that would protect him from the consequences. The letter before us is the result. " I might be much bold," says Paul, " to enjoin thee that which is convenient, yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee." Why might Paul have assumed the attitude of command ? Because he was an apostle, and because Philemon, equally with Onesimus, was his son in the Gospel. But Paul does not take the attitude he might have taken. Why ? For love's sake. Very well, if Paul abstained from the dictatorial and resorted to the persuasive—the supplicatory—the courteous—the respectful, which of his poor copyists in this late century will justify the adoption of a different style ? Few would care to justify such a thing theoretically, and yet many practise what they would be ashamed to preach. In their dealings with men and brethren they are not gentle and courteous, but imperious, abrupt, dogmatic, and disrespectful. This ought not to be so. Followers of Paul must be what Paul was if they are to follow him into the kingdom : they must be kind, gentle, courteous, easy to be entreated ; and not austere, haughty, unfeeling, harsh, implacable, overbearing, and unkind. These are the features of the old man, whose children " shall not inherit the kingdom of Christ and of God."

Paul beseeches Philemon to receive Onesimus, " not now as a slave, but above a slave, a brother beloved." " Receive him," says Paul, " as myself" : that is " if thou count me a partner." Paul does not even presume upon Philemon's recognition of his position. An egotist would have taken this for granted without qualification, and even paraded his presumption ; but Paul had modesty enough to allow the possibility of Philemon's thinking as little of him as he did of himself, " leaving us an example."

“ If he (Onesimus) hath wronged thee, or oweth thee aught, put that on mine account. I Paul have written it with mine own hand, *I will repay it.*” This is a very practical illustration of what Paul means when he exhorts believers to “ bear one another’s burdens.” It is a distinct taking by Paul on his own shoulders of the obligations which were burdensome to another. In this, some in our day might consider Paul a foolish enthusiast, that is, if their estimate of his case is to be argued from their view of such conduct in our day. Well, we must be on our guard against the influence of such. It is very common to praise virtue in the abstract, and admire it in remote times, but to pooh-pooh it when the occasion for it comes to our own door ; and on the other hand, men unite with refreshing unanimity in the condemnation of selfishness and rapacity that have become historic, but at the same time practise every day the same thing without compunction. In the name of our eternal well-being, let us be on our guard. There were men in the days of Christ who made a great show of religion, but of whom he said they bound heavy burdens on other men’s shoulders, but would not so much as lift a little finger to ease them. And there are the same sort now. We must not take our morality from them. Only the well-doing *prescribed by the King* will pass the King’s muster in the day of account ; and prominent as a feature thereof is this virtue illustrated in the words of Paul : “ I Paul have written it with mine own hand—I will repay it.” Let us be with Paul in the great day approaching. But if we stand with him then, it will be because we stand with him now in his rules of business, taking not our cue from the world in such matters ; but in all things acting on the principles on which we hope to govern and see the world governed in that glorious day when the haughtiness of men shall be brought down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted.

Christ Past and Future

The Table of the Lord a focus of pictures future and past.—Christ in all directions.—PAST, Christ in the days of his flesh.—The incidents of his life.—His teaching.—His death.—Despair of his disciples.—His resurrection on the third day.—Subsequent intercourse with his disciples.—His ascension.—The proclamation of his resurrection.—Comfort and joy among thousands.—The days of persecution.—The cooling of zeal.—Setting in of the apostasy.—The uprising of state “ Christianity.”—Rome and Constantinople centres of episcopal ambition and strife.—Twelve centuries of Roman darkness.—Revival of Gospel light.—FUTURE, the coming reappearance of the Lord.—The resurrection.—The war of the great day of God Almighty.—The reign of peace.—No fiction.—Sobering effect on the mind.—The wisdom of labouring to be accepted.

SURROUNDING this table once again, we stand related to wonderful facts which can never be too vividly remembered. They stretch away like lines of landscape from the spot where we stand, to a distant horizon behind us—a definite horizon on which the Biblical telescope can make out the

leading objects with wonderful distinctness ; they also lead away in front to the future to which our faces are turned ; a prospect so close to us as to be abrupt in a scenic point of view—Christ before, Christ behind. The whole landscape is coloured with Christ. We are here to look at it again. It is well to withdraw thus for such a purpose. We are weak and apt to forget. We are apt to have our eyes dimmed by the dust of the way. We are liable to be overcome with fatigue, and to get into some bypath and sit down and make ourselves comfortable. Christ knew our danger ; therefore, he left us this command, to assemble and “ do this ” in remembrance of him.

Behind us, we see Christ a babe, born in the rude surroundings of a village inn, and the stable of *that* ; an unnoticed object in a crowd of bustling visitors, who had repaired to Bethlehem on private business connected with the approaching taxation ordered by Augustus. We see shepherds arrive from the neighbouring fields, and make known the importance of the event of which they had learnt by angelic announcement. We see men arrive with strange enquiry for the born King of the Jews ; we see Joseph and Mary depart with their babe for distant Egypt ; we witness a subsequent slaughter of children on the same spot, and the piercing wail of the bereaved daughters of Rachel. We see the murderous instigator of the bloody deed die ; and Joseph and Mary return with their wonderful babe to the land, and turn aside to the privacy of an unimportant village, where the veil drops upon the everyday life of a carpenter with a growing family. Ten years pass, and the curtain rises for a moment and reveals Joseph and his household on the way with their neighbours—a happy band—to keep the Passover at Jerusalem. The feast over, they start on the return journey, but miss Mary’s first-born on the second day, on which, while the rest pursue their homeward journey, Joseph and Mary return in anxious haste to the city of God, and after search, discover their beloved boy in a circle of the learned men of the nation in the temple, astonishing them by the difficult questions he put, and by the understanding he displayed in the answers he gave to the questions put to him. Again the curtain drops, and in eighteen more years we see a strange preacher on the banks of the Jordan, to whom the people repair in crowds, and submit to baptism at his hands. Among the crowds there appears the form of Mary’s son, now a man of thirty, come to John to be baptized like all the people. John objects to baptize a sinless man, since his baptism was a baptism of repentance. Jesus claims to submit to every appointment of God ; John gives way ; Jesus is baptized ; and before there is time for another to follow his example, a shaft of Spirit-light strikes from heaven, and concentrating in dove-like form over the obedient son of Abraham, settles on his head and abides on him. And then the people hear a voice proclaiming that the man thus openly identified before them is not only “ Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham,” but the beloved Son of the God of Israel, in whom He is well pleased. Then we see him the object of curiosity on the part of sundry of John’s disciples, who walk after him, introduce themselves to him, and follow him home. Thenceforward there is no more dropping of the veil till the mortal scene is finished. After his forty days’ absence in the wilderness of temptation, Jesus is before the people day and night. He

speaks in a manner that strikes all the hearers with astonishment. They see that this is no ordinary man. He speaks as one having authority—as never man spake. He performs works unheard of in any nation. He cures every form of disease with a word : he has power over the elements of nature to combine them for the production of bread, or restrain the violence of tempest on the sea. He raises the dead. The people follow him in crowds. They are attracted by his miracles. They are pleased with his denunciation of the Scribes and Pharisees, and with his forcible inculcation of righteousness ; they are drawn by his tender care and compassion on the wants of the multitude. As he passes from city to city, the excitement spreads till the whole nation is roused. “ The world is gone after him,” say the leaders ; “ if we do not put some check upon it, the people will elect him king, and they will revolt against the Romans, and the Romans will come and take away our place and nation.” But the leaders are powerless for three years and a half. Jesus makes no attempt at sedition ; he even forbids the declaration that he is the Christ, and avoids the crowd when they show a disposition to take him by force and make him a king. But the leaders, probably, do not understand this. They are envious at the attention bestowed on him by the people, and exasperated at the condemnation he freely hurls at them in his discourses. They plot against him : they fail in all their attempts to destroy him until the hour arrives—pre-arranged in the Father’s purpose—for the power of darkness to prevail ; and then one of his own disciples is the means of delivering him up to the power and fury of his adversaries. And then, brethren and sisters, we see him on the cross, under a frowning sky, piercing the air with a cry of agony, dying that we might live, and by and by, all is silent, and his dead body is taken down and given to a rich man, who wraps it in clean linen, and lays it in his own private grave, hewn in the rock, in a garden hard by. Then we see the disciples secrete themselves in terror, and spend their time in grief—the women broken-hearted—the men in strange dismay. For the best part of three days all is darkness and despair. The glorious man who, by the power of God, had filled the land with joy for three years and a half, lies cold and dead, in a rock-hewn chamber, with brutal soldiers at the door. But on the third day, all is changed. Darkness suddenly flies before the glorious light of morning. An angel descends in brightness and power ; the Roman guards are overpowered by a strange paralysis. The stone barrier of the sepulchre door is violently removed ; the occupant of the tomb returns to life and comes forth ; the women who had come to anoint him with the fragrant spices for the dead, are apprised of the event, and see the evidence of it in their own beloved Lord himself. They carry the joyful tidings to the sorrow-struck disciples. These believe them not, and are afterwards reproved for their unbelief by the Lord standing in their presence and showing them his hands and feet. Then are the disciples glad when they see the Lord. New thoughts and new hopes arise. In six weeks he walks with them to a neighbouring solitude. They are hopeful of the speedy realization of their hope concerning the kingdom. They ask him if he will, at that time, restore the kingdom again to Israel. He tells them instead that they have a testimony to give for him among the nations of the earth—that the times and seasons are hid—that power would come to them for the work to be done. Then he is taken away ; they watch him with amaze-

ment as he departs ; he finally disappears from their sight. Then stand by them two angels, who express surprise at the steadfast gaze of the disciples, assuring them that the Lord who had been taken away from them, would assuredly return in the same manner as he had departed. Then follows a brief interval, during which the disciples are much together privately, spending the time in joyful contemplation and prayer ; after which we witness a new starting point—the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit upon them—the public proclamation of Christ's resurrection divinely confirmed by the display of superhuman gifts—the preaching of the name of Christ for the justification of sinners unto eternal life. Then we behold, succeeding, a period of great and prosperous activity among the apostles, the rapid multiplication of believers, the formation of communities of brethren everywhere, the prevalence of comfort and joy and the fear of the Lord among the thousands who received the Word. Then we see persecution and trouble ; then delay in the expected judgments on Jerusalem ; then the uprise of questions, strifes of words, heresies ; the perverse disputing of men of corrupt minds ; the death of the apostles one by one except John ; the cooling of zeal among professors, the growth of corruption among them in faith and practice ; then the publication of Christ's message to seven typical ecclesias in Asia, through John in Patmos, shining out in the thickening gloom with the brightness of a great light in heaven. Then John dies, the light goes out, darkness settles on the scene ; philosophy and vain deceit prevail over the simplicity of the Gospel, through the ingenuities of carnally-minded teachers ; Christians (so-called) turn soldiers and politicians ; they become a party in the State ; and in less than three centuries, they put "Christianity" on the throne by the sword of Constantine. Christianity, as a State institution, breeds political and ambitious bishops ; these strive for the mastery, even unto bloodshed. Rome and Constantinople become the leading rivals ; the controversy is decided in favour of Rome, and the monstrous Papal dynasty appears on the scene, and inaugurates a tyranny more odious and dreadful than anything the world has ever seen. More than twelve centuries of darkness and turmoil drag wearily by ; then, by the will of God, Gospel light revives—and here we stand at the end of the time appointed, looking for that re-appearance of the Lord promised to the disciples on the summit of Olivet.

When we direct our eyes forward, we see Christ more distinctly than even in the past. We see ourselves on the verge of that great change by which the kingdoms of the world are to be abolished, and transferred to a new order of rulers who have been in slow and painful preparation for ages past. Anon we see Christ again in the world, rousing his dead friends from their slumbers, apprising his living friends of his presence, and summoning them all before him for that grand assortment which has been both their hope and fear from the beginning. The judgment past, and the unfit sent back from his presence, we see him take part in the affairs of nations. We see him crush immense armies ; we see him send messages to the governments ; we see his claims set at naught, and mighty armaments raised to roll back the tide of his power. We behold a time of trouble such as never was. We hear the dreadful shock of war—universal war ; we see armies shattered, fleets destroyed, fortresses and cities in ruins, commerce at a stand-still. We see the tempest roar with unremitting fury till

the whole world is a wreck at the feet of Judah's Lion. Then slowly, calm ensues ; the storm abates ; the sun shines ; order returns ; a new government rises out of the universal chaos. The kingdom of God spreads over all ; the immortal friends of Christ take power everywhere in the name of " Divine right " ; peace overspreads the scene ; soldiers disbanded ; fortresses dismantled ; arsenals emptied ; the arts of war suppressed, and mankind set free to worship God under Heaven-sent guides and governors, and to live in joyful harmony everywhere, surrounded with plenty, and delivered from disease. " Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill toward men."

This is the picture before and behind us, as we take this bread in our hand, and drink this wine with thanksgiving, in remembrance of him who commanded this. It is no fiction of fancy ; it is no product of the imagination. It is the offspring of " words of truth and soberness." It is a sure and certain hope, built upon past and contemporary facts, as deep and solid and irrefutable as the everlasting foundations of the earth. The only uncertain element in the case pertains to our own individualities. Shall we be counted worthy of so great a salvation ? Is our attitude towards the Eternal Majesty of the heavens sufficiently acceptable before Him as to ensure for us an entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ ? Are we obedient, loyal, devoted, self-sacrificing, enthusiastic servants of this coming King of kings, and Lord of lords, who is now to us an absent Lord, to whom as stewards we shall give account ? Do we show ourselves his friends in carrying his cross and upholding his name and keeping his commandments ? Are we sufficiently wise to love him more than the things the world loves, and more than the things that we loved in the days of our ignorance ? Upon the answers to these questions, which will be infallibly given one day soon, will hang our destiny in this great matter. Suppose the Judge say, "NOT WORTHY OF ME," what grief, what vexation, what consternation, what unavailing tears of repentance, what horror of soul, what awful desolation will be ours ! Our groans, our " weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth " will recoil upon our ruined heads and increase our agony. Better weep now. Let the mind be sobered by the word and prayer. Realize thus what it is that Christ requires of us in all holiness and godly conversation,—"denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world ; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Then shall we assure our hearts before him, " that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming."

The Greatness of Christ

God has spoken.—The last message the most important.—The Word made flesh.—Jesus better than the angels.—Christ the builder.—Jesus the Spirit incarnate.—Unspeakable greatness of Christ.—His condescension.—The example of Christ forcible in view of who he was.—The humiliation of Christ.—His oneness with his brethren.—The highest dignity on earth.—Present sonship of Christ's brethren.—A truth lost sight of for generations.—Its great preciousness.—Sin destroyed by Christ.—Christ the intercessor, but intercessor only for the enlightened.

HEBREWS I.—Our meeting this morning is based on the fact stated in the opening verse of the chapter. If God had not spoken we would not have come together, but each would have been wandering in the way that ends in death. He has not spoken to us personally, yet has He spoken to us with an effect perhaps as great. He spoke to the fathers by the prophets, and to their children in the last days of Judah's commonwealth by His Son; and we have heard what was said, owing to the marvellous wisdom and kindness which caused the things to be written down. What was said was not, in the kindness of God, intended for those only to whom the word came in the first instance, but was at last made as wide as the world to everyone that had "ears to hear." Therefore we of the highways and hedges have an opportunity of sitting at the festal board of the King.

The word that last came forth is the most important of all: this is Paul's contention all through the Hebrews. God was the speaker in all cases; but the mode and importance of the communication varied with the "sundry times" in which it took place. At first by the angels; then by His Spirit in the prophets, but last by a Son—not His Son, though Jesus was His Son. "His" is not in the original; its insertion favours Trinitarianism; the correct translation is "by a Son," leaving room for the fact that God has "many sons whom he will bring unto glory" (Heb. 2:10). His word came *through man* before, but in this case His word was made man; it became flesh by the operation of the Spirit on Mary as described by the angel. The result was a man who was "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person," whom He constituted "the heir of all things," and of whom Paul could say, consequent on his relation to the First Cause, that he "upheld all things by the word of his power, and when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

The first chapter of Hebrews is devoted to showing that he was "much better than the angels" (verse 4), higher in rank and authority. The angels were commanded to worship him (verse 6). The angels are made subject to him (1 Pet. 3:22). The angels come with him as his servants (Matt. 25:31; 24:31). These things Paul proves from Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms. It was a matter that needed proving, and would come home with striking force to the Jews to whom he was writing. They had been accustomed to regard the prophets as objects of veneration; Moses as the founder of their polity, and angels as the highest dignity next

SEASONS OF COMFORT

to God. By these had God communicated with their fathers, and to the words of these had they been held accountable. When, therefore, Jesus of Nazareth, then recently crucified, was presented to them as a higher object than all, it was apt to stagger their faith and interfere with the connection of things formed by their national experience. They could not resist the testimony of his resurrection, confirmed by the marvellous signs wrought by the apostles: but their understanding needed to be brought into harmony with the fact which they were obliged to receive. This is done by Paul. He puts God first. *God* spake; angels were but the instruments of His power; the prophets but channels of utterance; Moses but a servant, "faithful in all his house, for a testimony of those things that were to be spoken after"; but Christ as a Son, "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person"; counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he that buildeth the house hath more honour than the house (Heb. 3:3), and God is the builder (3:4), and Christ was God manifested in the flesh (1 Tim. 3:16) and, therefore, the builder in manifestation, and consequently higher than all the earlier servant-instrumentalities.

Paul makes this fact the ground of his exhortation to earnest attention to what the Lord has spoken. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels (the law which was given by the ministration of angels) was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken *by the Lord?*" Again, further on (Heb. 12:25), "If they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from *him that speaketh from heaven.*" This speaking from heaven, as applied to Jesus, is intelligible in the light of his declaration, "I came down from heaven." The "I" in the case was the Word, "the Holy Spirit," "the Power of the Highest" that came upon Mary (Luke 1:35), causing the generation of the babe of Bethlehem, of whom the angel testified to Joseph, "That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 1:20). The person called Jesus was the result of this operation of the Spirit, yet in truth the Spirit and the person were one. They could not be separated. He was the Spirit become flesh, to which was afterwards superadded at his baptism in Jordan the Spirit in pure form, descending in visible and luminous shape and filling him without measure. The Spirit at all stages was the speaker and actor by him. He was, so to speak, the Spirit in flesh form, and, therefore, spoke of antecedent existence from eternity; "the Word was made flesh, full of grace and truth."

The unspeakable greatness of Christ in this respect is the fulcrum of Paul's exhortation. Our attention to the word of any one depends upon their rank or relation to the matter spoken of. If we met a beggar on an estate we should not give much heed to what he might say as to the conditions on which we might walk through it; but if we met the owner's son, the case would be different; we should give great heed. Our attention to his words would be the result of *our knowledge that he was the owner's son.* So in all matters, and above all in this matter. Knowing that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, and not a mere prophet, but one dwelling by the Spirit in the Father, and speaking with the authority of the Father, we learn to

hear with reverence when he says : " It has been said by them of old time, thus and so, but *I* say unto you." The *I* who thus puts himself higher than Moses is the God (in flesh-manifestation) who spoke to Moses, and who could therefore say, " I came down from heaven," " Before Abraham was, I am," " the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person." A recognition of this fact helps us to take our part in that bowing of the knee and confessing of the tongue which God requires of all flesh towards His Son Jesus Christ.

And it helps us to appreciate the great condescension of the Lord in his humiliation in the days of his flesh. We can understand the force of Paul's declaration, that " being in the form of God he thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men : and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross " (Phil. 2 : 6-8). To see a great man performing menial offices, is striking as an example of humility. To see a servant doing it, does not speak of humility. Our appreciation of the humility of the act depends upon our knowledge of the greatness of the actor. To know, then, that he who submitted to be a man without property, though heir of all things ; who refused the honours of a king, though they were his ; who condescended to the society of children, though in union with Eternal Wisdom ; who submitted to the derision of those who were usurpers of his power ; who washed the feet of his companions ; and who surrendered to the violence of a rabble, though he had power to destroy them with a word ; to know that he who left us this example of patience was the Father Himself, veiled in the seed of David (saying to Philip, " Have I been so long with you, and have ye not known me ? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father "), is to be greatly helped in our own submission to like evils, seeing that we are but sons of the dust, and have no standing before God, except such as He is pleased to grant us through Christ, His beloved.

We are drawn close to him in the contemplation of the days when he was " God manifest in the flesh." We not only behold the greater than Solomon, the greater than Jonas, the greater than the Temple, the Lord of the Sabbath, but we see him " made a little lower than the angels . . . that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man " (Heb. 2 : 9). We see him as one of ourselves, though verily in his quiet dignity, the majesty of heaven and earth. We see " the captain of our salvation," but " made perfect through sufferings." We have " a man of sorrows " ; of " travail of soul " ; of bitterness and grief, of strong crying and tears, offering prayers and supplications to Him that was able to save, and was heard in that he feared (5 : 7). In this we see that " both he (Jesus) that sanctifieth, and they (the saints) who are sanctified, are all of one "—one Father, one stock, one experience : " for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren." We are bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, and therefore bound up with him in the closest of connections—**BRETHREN OF CHRIST**. This is the highest dignity on earth, appreciated by those only who understand and see things in their ultimate bearings. It is full of blessing, now and in the age to come. It is present with us as a consolation and a joy, and a constraining power in the midst of evil and dishonour : the love of Christ is an ennobling grace in all in whom it dwells. But its true glory will

SEASONS OF COMFORT

be seen when the captain of our salvation stands once more on the earth, and invites his chosen companions of every kindred and nation to sit down with him in the glory, and honour, and power, incorruptibility and joy of the kingdom of God. Yet even this true glory springs from the present relation. We must be able to say with John : " Now are we the sons of God," before we can join with him in the confidence that " when he shall appear, we shall be like him." This is the declaration of truth contained in the name " Christadelphian "—not that all who acknowledge the name are necessarily the sons of God ; but it sets before the world a great truth that has been lost sight of in the workings of the apostasy in generations past. It proclaims the scriptural standing of obedient believers as the sons of God and brethren of the Lord Jesus. Popular theology has no place for this idea. It regards man as an immortal subject of damnation, rescued from hell by the interposition of the eternal God in one of His so-called triune elements, and therefore in the cowering position of a mere creature in relation to the so-called Eternal Son. The word " Christadelphian " represents the rejection of this travesty of truth, and the revival of the scriptural teaching that Adam's race is mortal, and that from among them a family is being gathered for immortality by adoption through Christ, to be sons of the Father, and rejoicing and holy brethren of him who manifested his love and his power in Israel 1,800 years ago. The name is, in fact, a symbol of the sentiment expressed by John when he said, " Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God " (1 John 3 : 1). This sentiment is a great possession to those who stand in the favoured position. It speaks to them of the Father's friendship ; it is the pledge of sins forgiven ; it is the incentive to vigilance against sin, and striving after true holiness. It represents the delightful truth that the Lord, in the flesh and blood of his brethren, destroyed, through death, their great destroyer, Sin ; and delivered them who, through fear of death, were subject to bondage. In all things, Paul tells us, it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the making reconciliation for the sins of the people. He is enabled to fulfil this part in that " he himself hath suffered, being tempted." He stands to obtain forgiveness for his brethren for all their shortcomings, and sends succour to those that are tempted. This is his part as " a merciful and faithful high priest." His mercy and his faithfulness are assured to his brethren, who strive to fulfil the part he assigns to them in his messages to the seven churches. They are not available for such as are in bondage to the world in its affections and lusts. They are not for those with whom Christ is no dweller by faith. They are not for those who are barren in the fruit of the Spirit, and who, unforgiving and great in flesh, think comfortably of themselves that they are rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing—in ignorance of the staring fact that towards God they are " poor, and miserable, and wretched, and blind, and naked." They are for the poor in spirit, the broken and contrite in heart, the pure of hands, the forgiving of heart, the helpers of the poor and needy, the workers of righteousness, working out their own salvation with fear and trembling. Such are tenderly commended to the mercy of the Father by the Son, whose voice is always heard ; their prayers are accepted, their trespasses forgiven, and their weakness aided in the

fight. They overcome at the last, and in the day of his glory they will appear in the blood-washed throng, and join in the mighty anthem of the Saviour's praise !

God's Work on Earth

We are but of yesterday.—Our origin poor.—Patriotic pride a fallacy.—England 1,800 years ago.—European tour to Rome.—Paul's work in the first century.—Strange progress of the testimony in Roman empire.—Ecclesia of the Romans in the first century.—The prodigies attending the advocacy of the truth.—Paul in prison.—His appearance and condition.—Carnal view of his position.—Paul's account of himself.—The meaning of Jesus being the Christ.—Its connection with Jewish history and the promises.—Salvation only in Christ.—From Abraham backward to Adam in Eden.—The history of God's doings from that time.—Abel, Enoch, Noah.—Antediluvian society.—The flood.—Melchizedek.—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob.—Israel in Egypt.—Moses.—His premature expectations.—The wonders in the land of Egypt.—The trials of Moses in the wilderness.—The sword of Joshua.—Israel's disobedience.—Forbidden intimacy with other nations.—Rejection of the prophets.—The appearance of Christ at the close of the Mosaic dispensation.—His rejection.—The features of his example.—The response of every faithful heart.

EVERY time we come together at the table of the Lord, we are reminded that the matter which brings us here is not of yesterday. *We are of yesterday* ; most of our immediately surrounding circumstances are of yesterday, and if we suffered our thoughts to be moulded by these alone, we should find ourselves adopting a completely mistaken policy of life. It is well to think of things as they are related to the ceaseless and endless stream of time. A little way back, totally different circumstances prevailed. Go far enough back, and there was no Birmingham. The place where we stand this morning was forest, inhabited by our forefathers—painted savages, who practised Druidical rites of cruelty, and lived by fishing and hunting. The rock whence we are hewn as natural men, is poor stuff. There is no room for boasting. Patriotic pride is very much of a fallacy when all things are considered. It is a sentiment alien to the heart where Christ dwells by faith.

Eighteen hundred years ago, proud England was but a recently annexed and uncertain barbarian province of the Roman Empire. Crossing the Channel we should have begun to come in contact with a more interesting state of things. France would have given token of a civilization far in advance of that existing in the British Isles. Travelling south and east, we should have found these tokens thicken in the path ; till penetrating the Alpine passes, smiling Italy would have opened on our view, with her multiplying monuments of human art and skill. Traversing her broad and cultivated plains, we should at last, from a different direction to that from which Paul reached it, have come on the great London of the time, and more than London—the mistress of the world and the paragon of metro-

SEASONS OF COMFORT

opolitan beauty—Rome, the capital of universal empire and the home of three millions of people ; unrivalled in the beauty of her situation, the magnificence of her architecture, the spaciousness of her streets, and the splendour of all that relates to ornament and taste.

Mixing in society, at this swarming and imperial centre of population, we should have learnt, among other things, that a strange revolution was in progress in the eastern provinces of the empire ; that a certain agitator was disturbing the lesser Asia with new doctrines, and had succeeded in bringing the State religion into discredit, causing the people by thousands to abandon the worship of the gods “ as by law established.” Centres of this heresy we should have learnt were Ephesus, Thessalonica, and Philippi. Enquiring further, we should have been informed that the new movement was an importation from Syria ; that the ringleader was a man named Paul (who was a turncoat from the Jewish religion) ; that the disciples of the new religion were known as Nazarenes and Christians ; that the thing was spreading, and that no infliction of punishment was effectual to stop it ; although the Nazarenes themselves used no violence, nor even retaliated upon those who were ill-using them ; that both Jews and Pagans were alike hostile to it, but without effect. Pressing our inquiries as to what this Nazarene stir was about, we might have learnt, as Festus told Agrippa, that it was about one Jesus who was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. If, unsatisfied with this information, we had sought to institute closer inquiries, we might have learnt that there was a body of Nazarenes in Rome itself, started by certain Jews who returned from the feast of Pentecost at Jerusalem in the year answering to the modern A.D. 34. Expressing a curiosity to see them, we might have been guided to their meeting-place—some obscure room in the great city. We would have found them a large, increasing, and enthusiastic assembly, superintended by men possessing remarkable gifts dating from the year aforesaid, and in active communication with their fellow-believers in all parts of the empire ; so that their faith came to be spoken of throughout the whole world. Intercourse with them would have enlightened us as to the nature and object of Nazarene operations in general. We would have found it no matter of marvel that they were arresting public attention so successfully. We should have heard and seen that many prodigies attended the advocacy of their doctrines. The healing of the sick, the cleansing of the leper, the making whole of the lame, and the raising of the dead, in their public proceedings ; and the instantaneous speaking of known foreign languages by illiterate members, the utterance of prophecy, and the exercise of miraculous discernments among themselves privately ; would have convinced us that God was working with them, confirming their words with signs following.

If stimulated to pursue our journey eastward, into the neighbourhood of their greatest triumph in Asia, we should have found ourselves at last in the same town with Paul ; but perhaps unable to get at him, in consequence of his being in prison. Perseverance and influence might have enabled us to get access to him even there. The interview in his prison would have been interesting, though probably not so much so as it would be now, after the understanding that the lapse of time has enabled us to attain unto. We should have found a plain, stern, sad-looking, bearded Jew, of middle size, with an over-worked look about him, “ pressed out of

measure, above strength, despairing even of life." Probably his countenance would show bruises. As for his clothes, not finely clad ; not a gentleman to look at, but one accustomed to the reputation of being a pestilent fellow, a vagabond, the off-scouring of all things, and very likely looking a little like it, with his ugly chain holding him to his place. If like Onesiphorus, we might possibly have been not ashamed of his chain. If over fine, with the proud flesh of the carnal mind uncauterized by the truth, we might have felt a shrinking, a reservation, a doubt whether a man of the sort before us could be the instrument of a Divine mission ; whether a man who could work miracles could possibly get into such a position ; whether it was not after all some affair of plebeian fanaticism, with which it would be prudent not to defile our respectability.

"Conversation would have dispelled our misgivings. "May we ask, Paul, what is the secret of this course on your part which brings you into such trouble ? We understood you were once a respectable Jew at Jerusalem." "Yes ; after the strictest sect of our religion I was brought up a Pharisee at the feet of Gamaliel, in Jerusalem, and was more zealous of the traditions of the fathers than many of my equals." "Were you a Nazarene at the time ?" "No ; I was opposed to the Nazarenes, and took a leading part in the persecution of them. I was exceedingly mad against them, persecuting them even to strange cities, and made myself very busy, haling men and women to prison, entering into every house where they were, making great havoc among them, even unto death." "How came you to be a preacher of the faith you once so zealously destroyed ?" "Well, as I was on a special commission to Damascus from the chief priests I drew near the city at midday, when, in the very midst of a retinue of officers and attendants, a blinding light, more dazzling than the sun, struck me and threw me on the ground, and immediately I heard a voice saying, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?' I said, 'Who art thou, Lord ?' for I had no idea but that I was doing God service in what I was about. The voice answered, 'I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.' Then I was permitted to see the person who spoke to me, and I saw that it was Christ, whom I had known before after the flesh. I was greatly amazed. I asked what he would have me to do. He told me to go into Damascus, and call for one Ananias, who should tell me what I ought to do. He then told me that he had appeared unto me that I might be a witness for him unto the peoples and kings to whom he would send me, to open their eyes that they might obtain forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among the saints. Then the vision faded from my view, and the voice ceased, and I was lying on the ground, blind. Those with me raised me up ; but I could not see, and had to be led into the town, like a blind man. In three days, Ananias came to me, and told me the Lord Jesus had appeared to him, and had directed him to come to me. He laid his hands on me, and immediately my eyes were opened ; and Ananias told me the Lord had appeared to me by the way for the purpose of making me a witness to the things which I was ignorantly opposing. Thus I became a Nazarene, and began immediately, to the great astonishment of the Jews, to preach that Jesus was Christ."

Then had we asked Paul what Jesus being the Christ meant, we should have found our attention directed to an age as far back from Paul's day as

he is from ours. He would have spoken to us of the fathers, and of promises to them of blessing to come through a great Anointed One of God, who was to arise in the line of their generations. He would have made us know, if we before had been ignorant, that the Jews had been in the Holy Land more or less for 1,500 years ; that they were God's nation, to whom He had given a Law at the beginning, and whom for all that length of time He had visited with prosperity or trouble, according as they were obedient or not ; that they were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, going back to whose age we should have found them sojourning in the land of the Amorites as strangers, in obedience to a divine command, the full scope of which they did not comprehend, but which involved a pledge that they were to receive the land for a possession at some future time. Questioning Paul, we should have found that outside the channel of this promise, there was no permanent good to be realized by men ; that the nations of antiquity had passed away without hope, as strangers from the covenants of promise ; that judgment had passed upon all men to condemnation, and that salvation was only in Christ, the promised deliverer.

Had we enquired of the antecedents of Abraham's time, we should have found ourselves conveyed backwards to the Flood ; and a still further stage, bridging more than sixteen centuries, would have brought us to the beginning of all Adamic living. In the confines of the garden of Eden, we should have beheld Adam expelled for transgression ; and the history of human misery begun. Slowly resuming our journey backwards, we might have learnt the purpose of God in the development of human affairs. Abel, obedient, with a child-like simplicity to what was required, murdered by Cain from Cain's wounded self-love, would have evoked our sympathy, and taught us the wisdom of faith in the word, and obedience to the commandments of God. Enoch, walking with God 365 years, while his contemporaries were content with the mere gratification of the eye and ear, and other senses, in contact with nature, would have stimulated us to consider all things from God's point of view ; while his translation that he should not see death, because he pleased God, does help us even now to remember that " walking worthy of God in all well pleasing " leads at last to a time when this corruptible shall put on incorruptibility, when the present world shall have passed as entirely away as the sensuous neighbours of Enoch, whose memory is as forgotten as if they had never been. Noah's solitary faithfulness in the midst of a population abandoned to the pleasures of society among beautiful women and strong men, and holiday delights ; God's way disregarded and corrupted, and prosperity crowning the paths of the disobedient, as saith Job : " The wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power. Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull gendereth, and faileth not ; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and they rejoice at the sound of the organ. . . . They say unto God, Depart from us ; for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."—Noah's faithfulness in such surroundings tells us to be steadfast in our day. The wide-sweeping destruction that came by water upon the world of the ungodly reminds us of the terrible visitation in store, by which the present order will be utterly

destroyed in the day of the Lord's vengeance ; while Noah's safety from fear in the ark, which had been the butt of the ungodly's ridicule, finds its parallel in the salvation which will be ours in Christ in the great and terrible day of the Lord, if we are not ashamed of him and his word in this wicked and adulterous generation. Melchizedek's reign in righteousness and peace would have refreshed us with a foretaste of the glory and renown of the priest for ever after his order ; and the acquaintance of Abraham, who paid him tithes of all, would have taught us the humility of the friend of God ; while his patient submission to expatriation, and his patient endurance of pilgrimage among strangers, against hope believing in hope, would have taught us to walk in the steps of that faith by which he, the " heir of the world," pleased God, and obtained the testimony that he was righteous. Isaac's continuance in the same, and Jacob's trust in the God of his fathers, while burdened with parental anxieties, and even fears, would have drawn us nearer Israel's God. Joseph's early attachment to the ways of God, and his unconquerable adhesion to righteousness, would have told us to seek also the God of Jacob early, that we might find him ; while his deliverance out of all adversity in his promotion to Pharaoh's side, contained the assurance that God will deliver all at last who put their trust in Him, and exalt them among the princes of the God of Abraham. Israel's sufferings would have told us that God permits evil to His own people ; while the communication on the subject to Moses at the bush would have taught us the precious lesson that God is not unmindful of what goes on, though He be silent, but will at last awake to vengeance and redemption. Joseph's parting words to his brethren (of the certainty of the promised deliverance), and the faithfulness of the mother of Moses concerning the same matter, help us to be steady in our hope in the midst of apparent discouragements. Moses, at first premature in his expectation that God, by his hand, would deliver Israel, tells us of the possibility of being too fast in our interpretation of the divine purposes, and warns us not to be cast down at apparent failure in our hopes. We are at the dawning of the day, and we thought the hour had arrived with the expiry of the " time, times, and a half " of the Little Horn, for the rising of the Sun ; but as yet we wait. But if we fly to the wilderness, like Moses, it is with the certainty of returning at no long-distant date to inflict the promised vengeance. Moses, perhaps grown dispirited, was suddenly interrupted in his ordinary avocation by the angel of the Lord at the bush ; thus may we suddenly be refreshed by the messenger of the Lord's presence to announce the glad tidings of his reappearance to bring salvation. The wonders in the land of Egypt tell us that when the Lord begins his work, the Pharaohs of the present time will be as nothing, with all their power and glory ; that the haughtiness of man will be humbled, and the Lord alone exalted in the day of the coming deliverance, when we shall be permitted to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb, in celebration of the consummated redemption of Israel from all his enemies. The narrative of the wandering and rebellions in the wilderness shows us the trials of a faithful man who, seeking the salvation of Israel and the glory of the Mighty One of Jacob, was factiously opposed by petty men, great in their own esteem, whose carcasses, falling in the wilderness, justified Moses in the sight of all Israel. This helps us to accept a similar experience, and to persevere in hope of a like deliverance. The

wonders wrought by the sword of Joshua tell us of the great destruction that is coming on all the world in the great day of Jehovah's wrath when they shall drink of the wine of the fierceness of the wrath of God, poured out without mixture. The remembrance will help us to make use of this time of tranquillity, in preparing to meet God—to which the world around are all indifferent. Then we see Israel disobedient in the land, making affiance with the strange people of the land, and exciting God's displeasure ; and we think of the command addressed to us in the Gospel : " Come out from among them, and be ye separate, and I will receive you." " Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." " We have here no continuing city ; we seek one to come." With these precepts in our minds, we are emboldened to be steadfast in this policy of consecration, undeterred by the disapprobation of unwise friends, or the calumnies and condemnations of such as speak evil of the things they understand not. We see Israel disobedient to the prophets in their generations, and we are reminded of our own times, when the command of Christ, promulgated to the Gentiles, to repent and turn unto God, is set at nought as a myth and a vanity. But we remember that there was a remnant in Israel who " feared the Lord and thought upon His Name " ; and we remember that God has said of them : " They shall be mine in the day when I make up my jewels ; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." When we think of this, we are encouraged to pursue a similarly unpopular course, adhering to the narrow way, " denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for the blessed hope," and enduring the contradiction of sinners. We see the prophets themselves subject to evil in their day and generation, " destitute, tormented, and afflicted, wandering in sheepskins and goatskins, in dens and caves of the earth ; of whom the world was not worthy " ; and we think of James' exhortation : " Take, my brethren, the prophets, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience."

We come at last to the bright particular " star that rose out of Jacob ; the sceptre that rose out of Israel "—to whom give all the prophets witness ; the rod out of the stem of Jesse—the branch that grew out of his roots—the promised Seed—God manifest in the flesh. And what see we ? A hero in triumph ? A king in glory ? No ! He came to his own, and his own received him not. They saw no beauty in him to desire him. They hid their faces from him. He was despised and afflicted ; a man of no esteem—a friend of publicans and sinners—who had not where to lay his head. A man of sorrow, who made grief his companion ; the HEIR OF ALL THINGS ; on account of whom the ages have been constituted, the economy of things set in order. If he was cast out in his day, shall we begrudge our unpopularity ? If HE went about doing good, shall we not addict ourselves to the same calling, unprofitable and foolish in the eyes of the world ? If to him his meat and his drink was to do the will of his Father, shall we join a brainless generation in the intoxicated fascination of the petty prosperities of the present order of things, and in their forgetfulness of God ? Nay ; if we are called fools for our pains, even by such as ought to know better, we will emulate the Son of God in our consecration to the high calling to which God has called all perishing mortals, with willing ears. We remember that he said we must deny ourselves, and we say, " Lord, help us to please not

our carnal selves, but thyself who hast bought us." We remember that it hath been told us that he left us an example that we should follow his steps ; and when we think that he was meek and lowly of heart, and that he was led like a lamb before its shearers, dumb, opening not his mouth, we pray to be conformed to his image, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, nor avenging ourselves, but committing our cause to him that judgeth righteously, and who will assuredly repay the adversary abundantly. We remember his request of love that we should celebrate his memory weekly in the breaking of bread ; and we say, " We will not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." We remember that he said, " I will come again," and we say, " Come, Lord Jesus ; come quickly. Amen."

Strangers and Sojourners

Strangers and sojourners.—The policy of the world unlawful for saints.—The reputed virtue of saving.—Evil varnished with good professions.—Danger of riches.—May be honourably possessed.—Job an example.—How to use riches.—The promise of the life that now is.—Its extent and bearing.—God's guidance.—The lot desirable for saints.—A Joseph of Arimathæa occasionally.—A royal gathering of such in the age to come.—" The Lord is my helper."—Suitable language for saints.—Cant and sincerity.—Pure forms of speech.—Speaking like the company we keep.—Laying aside every weight.—Cherishing present advantage at the expense of Christ's friendship.—The call of wisdom and the results awaiting our answer.—" Praise ye the Lord."—Adoration the highest act of created intelligence.—Mortal man in his right place.—The lessons of the past.—God first, reasonable.—The final thunderous peal of praise.

WHAT IS OUR position this morning, but an illustration of the statement of the Word, that we are but strangers and sojourners ? The symbols on the table tell us that we are waiting for the Master ; and the Master, when he comes, is to destroy the present order of things. Consequently, " this is not our rest." " We have no continuing city here." We are merely passing through. Our aim is beyond. Our citizenship is in heaven. We are " looking for that blessed hope." We show the Lord's death " *till he come.*"

But these facts ought to find a further expression than merely in our meeting together to break bread. They are not facts with us if they do not affect the whole life. We are under law to Christ, and his law is very specific on sundry matters pertaining to our temporal ways. It tells us, for instance, in the scripture read, that we are to " let our conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as we have " (Heb. 13 : 5). What is this but condemning in a saint that which is a deliberately chosen policy with the world ? To make money is the great aim among those who know not God. To save is extolled as the very highest virtue. To be rich is to be honoured. It is the old story : " Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself " (Psa. 49 : 18). Hereby are saints in great danger.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

They are liable to fall in with the general tendency, and to set up Mammon as the god of their lives. Of course, it would not be acknowledged in this form. All evil things are varnished with "good words and fair speeches" which deceive the hearts of the simple; and this treachery to Christ would be glossed over with pleasant phrases. One would not allow, to himself even, that his policy is to establish and secure himself, when all the while there may be scarcely another motive at work. The heart is deceitful. The nectar of the golden cup is intoxicating, and quickly finds the head, and makes the poor thing reel in the path of Christ. Riches may be honourably possessed if used as Job used them. The picture of his doings is profitable to contemplate because it is a picture of a man whom God praised. He imprecates a curse upon himself if the following things were true: "If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail; or have eaten my morsel myself alone, and the fatherless hath not eaten thereof; if I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or any poor without covering; if his loins have not blessed me, and if he were not warmed with the fleece of my sheep. . . . If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much." And then he says: "The stranger did not lodge in the street; but I opened my doors to the traveller." "Did not I weep for him that was in trouble? Was not my soul grieved for the poor?" Job is pointed to by James as an example. The excellence of that example is manifest. His was the case of a man "making to himself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness." He exemplified beforehand the exhortation of Paul: "Charge them that are rich that they be not highminded. . . . that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

To rich and poor alike, the exhortation of wisdom is, in the words read: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; be content with such things as ye have; for he hath said, *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*" Here is a promise made to the fathers directly applied, by the Spirit in Paul, to their children—believers in all ages who are sons and not bastards. It is a promise having reference to the present life, as the context shows. Godliness hath promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come (1 Tim. 4 : 8). And what is the promise? That we shall have plenty? No; perhaps that would be a curse. That we shall always be well off? No; perhaps that would blind our weak eyes to the wretchedness of our present lot, and dim the glory that is to be revealed. It is a promise that we shall not be left or forsaken; and this means a great deal. It means that come prosperity or come trouble, come plenty or come poverty, come health or come sickness, come honour or come reproach, come the couch of ease or the bed of thorns, come weal or come woe—come what may, if we are the called according to His purpose (which will be evinced by our obedience of His commandments in all things), He will be at the helm, to make all things work together for our ultimate good, even in such things as may incline us to say: "All these things are against us." And if God be for us, with Paul we may say: "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things

to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The lot desirable for saints, in this present probation, is nowhere better shadowed forth than in the prayer of Agur : " Give me neither poverty nor riches : feed me with food convenient for me " (Prov. 30 : 8). But occasionally, a Joseph of Arimathæa is wanted. " A rich man and a counsellor " can do sometimes necessary work that is beyond the reach of Christ's poor men. When such are needed, God provides them, and they do their work with humility, but such are few and far between. Thanks be to God, the day is coming when they will not be few. His purpose will require a royal gathering of them—poor men once—but prepared in trial for the great joy of sharing with Christ the riches and the glory of all the earth, in wisdom, and strength, and joy, and immortality. This world of fools will then have passed away. The nightmare of the seven-headed monster will have vanished before the dawn of the blessed morning without clouds, when the glory of Yahweh shall be revealed, and fill the whole earth as the waters cover the sea. Where then will be such as disregard the apostolic counsel, and " let their conversation be always with covetousness, never content with such things as they have," but always grasping after more ? They will be with the poor quadrupeds which " fill their holes with prey, and their dens with ravin."

So that we may boldly say, " The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." If this was suitable language for saints of the first century, how is it unsuitable now ? It cannot be so. It can only be a saintship having a name to live, but dead, that finds such language awkward. Of course, there is such a thing as cant ; no righteous man would advocate that ; but there is such a thing as the other extreme. There is such a thing as being proud before God ; not broken and contrite in heart ; not humble under His mighty hand ; ashamed to acknowledge our dependence on Him. This is the natural man, who is strong with us all to start with. But we have put on the new man, if we be Christ's ; and the language of the new man is a different thing from that of the old. The language of the new man is to be learnt in the Word. The Spirit of the new man is to be drunk in there. Let this Word dwell richly in us, and we shall soon be at home in those pure, lofty, dignified forms of speech in which it finds expression. If we fail to read the Word continually we shall fail in this matter of salt-seasoned speech.

We always speak like the company we keep. If we are all the while among the foul-mouthed gabblers of the flesh, we cannot expect to be free of their Sodomite brogue. If we read nothing but the literature of atheistical refinement, we shall never rise above that thin, proper, superficial, cold style of talk, in which a practically godless state of mind expresses itself. Give us the atmosphere of the Spirit, and the company of the Spirit's watchmen in the Word, and we are in altogether a healthier land. " Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord ; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."

Another lesson affecting our ordinary life is contained in the words : " Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race that is set before us." Men on a journey

do not unnecessarily burden themselves. A man running to catch a train puts up with the dust and discomfort of his hurried exertion. The principle is the same. In the race for life eternal, there are many things lawful enough in the abstract, but that viewed in relation to the object to be attained, are highly inexpedient, and to be "laid aside," as Paul advises. It is a simple, and a safe, and a reasonable, and a wise rule, and one that will give us much cause for joy at the last, to dispense with every habit or pleasure, or occupation, or friend, that hinders our progress in the narrow way. This is but another way of saying what Christ said: "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out. It is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into the fire of Gehenna." It is better to make our calling and election sure at the expense of worldly friends and engagements and advantages, than to secure all these in this present time, and find, at last, that we have cherished them at the expense of Christ's approbation, and have to pay for them with the loss of the kingdom of God. These considerations may fall faintly now on the heart pre-occupied with the affairs of this life; but in the day certain to come—as certain as the final flight of the life that is every hour passing with us now—they will be felt with a force and a grief that will cause "weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth." It is better to listen to wisdom now in the day of her call. She stands at the door and knocks, saying, "Receive my instruction, and not silver; and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it." The spirit tells us to hear: and the reason is beautiful: "Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her, and happy is every one that retaineth her." But if we turn away from her voice, a terrible retribution awaits: "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord."

Yet another lesson: "By him (Jesus) therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name." What is this but the continual command of the Spirit in the Psalms: "Praise ye the Lord"? A necessary lesson, indeed, that needs to be continually dinned in our ears! We have come from a state of things in which no sentiment is more distant or unreal than ascription of honour and thanksgiving to God. The carnal mind reigns in the world in all its rank development; "it is not subject to the law of God, neither can be." God is not in all their thoughts. They say, "Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?" If there is one lesson we have to learn more than another, it is that it belongs to our calling in Christ to "offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." God will be praised. This He declares of Himself: "I will be exalted in the earth" (Psalm 46: 10). "My glory will I not give to another" (Isa. 42: 8).

“ He that offereth praise glorifieth me ” (Psa. 50 : 23). He has revealed that all things are formed for His glory ; for His pleasure they were created. All intelligence is out of Him, and must bow to Him, as saith the scripture : “ Every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue confess.” Adoration of Him is the highest act of created intelligence. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Nothing exists by itself or for itself. All exist in God ; all power, and strength, and wisdom, beauty and wealth is of Him. Nothing can be without Him ; all would perish by a word if He gave it. But He is great and wise, and kind, and long-suffering ; and so the world is established that it cannot be moved.

All flesh before Him is as nothing. He will not allow the flesh to glory in His sight. Adam was banished from Eden for casting dishonour on Him by disobedience. Moses was punished for taking to himself the credit of the miracle at the rock of Meribah. David fell into the hands of God, in three days’ plague, for exulting in the numbers of his army. The Assyrian was brought down for taking to himself the credit of what God did by him in the punishment of Israel. Mighty and arrogant Nebuchadnezzar was sent to herd among the beasts till he learnt that “ the heavens do rule.” Herod was eaten up of worms, because he gave not God the glory ; and salvation is by God in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself—not of works, lest any man should boast.

It is all very reasonable. The Eternal should be first ; the first should be highest ; the Omnipotent should be feared ; the Most Excellent should be worshipped. The Creator of all things, the source of all life, the upholder of the universe, the giver of all good, the fountain of life eternal—should be extolled, and had in supremest reverence. “ Holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty : heaven and earth are full of his glory.” What abortions and bastards of saints must we be, if we are backward to join our mortal praise with the ascriptions of the angelic host ! We must, or perish. The education of the truth is to prepare us to take part in that mighty anthem which will peal forth thunderously, like the noise of many waters, to the honour of the Eternal Father : “ Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power : for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.”

The Unsearchable Riches of Christ

Wisdom of the Breaking of Bread.—The memory of Christ.—The only agreeable memory, Christ very high.—A Captain.—Selects his brethren.—They do not select him.—Highest loyalty required.—The favours Christ has for bestowal.—The called.—First a preliminary and indiscriminate calling.—The calling to be made sure by diligence.—The sort of diligence wanted.—The danger of being sucked in by the world's maelstrom.—Self-serving right in its place, but must be subject to divine law.—Dangers.—The harvest of a wise life.—Glory, honour, and immortality.—The contrast between the end of saint and sinner.—The beauty of wisdom.—Wise things disagreeable for a time.—But see them at their end.—The honour waiting the approved of God.—Human insects.—Everlasting glory.

THE longer we live, the more do we see the wisdom of Christ in having required his brethren and sisters to come together once a week, to break bread in remembrance of him. There is nothing in the life we have to live during the six days of the week, to remind us of him. Everything tends in the opposite direction. If we were to be guided only by what we see and hear, we should conclude there never had been such a man, and that therefore there were not in store for us any of those great things which the truth teaches us to look for in association with his blessed name. Let us not be unduly depressed by this delusion of the senses. What is true of Christ in this respect is true of everything else. We should never know, in the daily walks of life, that there ever had been such a man as Napoleon ; yet no one doubts that there was such a man. It is precisely because there is nothing in ordinary experience to remind us of Christ that he has made this special appointment. The purpose is expressed in these words of his : " Do this *in remembrance of me.*" It is a very agreeable thing to be reminded of him. In one sense, it is the only agreeable thing ; for in all other directions, tracing things to their end, there is nothing but blighted hopes, darkened prospects, the dreary ending of a vain life in the grave. Paul puts Christ no higher than we ought to put him when he says : " In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," and he gives a caution that is not unnecessary, when he adds : " This I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. . . Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." He put Christ and the philosophy of his day in juxtaposition. They were antagonistic the one to the other, and it is no less so now. Philosophy teaches that a future existence is an affair of " virtue," the natural offspring of a " moral " course. The doctrine of Christ teaches that without him, there can be no future existence ; that it is a special manifestation through him alone ; and that all without Christ are without hope and without God in the world. This puts Christ very high, but no higher than Paul puts him, and no higher than Christ asks us to put him, when he insists on being the supreme object of our affections. We well know the position he occupied in the minds of the disciples when on earth ; they had no higher object. We know that all men look up to

anyone whom they accept as their captain, with very great respect. Whether it be in politics or military matters, the head man, the captain, in whom trust is reposed, is the great object of regard. Fealty to him in such cases is, as it were, the test of membership ; submission to the common head, the first condition of the organization. We know that the very first idea of the army is obedience. Now we have a Captain. We have a Head, a Leader, a Lord, and a Master. We have not seen him, yet we know he lives. We have not chosen him ; he has chosen us. So he said to the twelve immediately around him ; and if he could say so to them, how much more to us, who have been selected in a much more indirect way ; who never would have known him but for the voice of invitation coming to us through the channels of his own appointment. In the natural order of things (that is, if Christ had not appeared and sent out a call to all willing men to become his) we should have been occupied like the Gentiles around, with mere questions of eating and drinking, and being comfortable and merry in this mortality, indulging in Pagan dreams of futurity, doomed to eternal disappointment. We therefore realize this idea that this Captain differs from other captains, in that he himself makes his own election. It is not as if his people were a political party, looking round and choosing the man that happens to suit them best. The movement proceeds from him. He has sent out agents (his apostles) for the purpose of creating a party for himself, and the party so created differs from all other parties that ever surrounded a leader. It is called to a much closer relation to the Captain than in worldly parties. Personal loyalty is exacted in the highest degree, and is returned by the Captain (as we shall see at his coming) in a far higher form than the affection ever conceived by a mortal leader for his partizans. As to the first, the rule of the service is, "Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." As to the second, he has laid down his life for his friends ; and has promised that when all shall have proved their faithfulness, he will "make them sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them." And what does this making them sit down to meat involve ? The most a human leader can do for his supporters, is to distribute mammon among them ; his favours leave them the same perishing creatures, who, while alive, are weak and abortive in the functions of their being ; and, in a few years must sink under the law of death, and disappear below the clod, saying farewell to all friendship, honour, and possessions.

How different the favour bestowed by the Captain of our salvation ! Having come forth and made his choice, he invests them with a vigour of constitution that shall never decay ; clearness of faculty that can never grow dim ; purity of nature that will never fade or corrupt ; life that will never end. And having thus qualified them, he invites them to his society, and a participation in the glory, honour, riches, and renown which will be his as the Lord of all the earth. "Having made his choice." Ah, this is the problem big with fate for us. The choice is not yet made. That is, though known to him, it is not yet declared. The basis of the choice has been laid. His order of procedure is to gather material from which the choice is to be made ; to cast the net into the sea, and enclose a great many many fishes, good and bad ; to sow the seed broadcast and wait until the harvest to separate the good from the bad. The reason of this procedure

SEASONS OF COMFORT

we shall find to be based in wisdom when we know all. Probably it is that a situation may be provided for the trial, exercise, and development of the good. If none but good fish came into the net, if none but faithful men and women responded to the call, things would be too sweet and smooth among believers. There would be no trial of the patience which shows itself in perseverance in duty under bitter circumstances. However, be that as it may, there is first a preliminary and indiscriminate call. It is something to have been included in that. By the Gospel, Peter said, God visited the Gentiles, to take out from amongst them a people for His name. We have heard that Gospel, we have fallen in love with it, with all the hopes and promises it presents to our mind ; and, yielding obedience to it, we have become the subjects of the preliminary "taking out." We have now to accomplish the other point referred to by Peter when he says, "Be diligent to make your calling and election *sure*." This is the time for diligence ; it is not a state of things in which we can congratulate ourselves upon being safe. There is nobody safe ; that is to say, nobody can say that they are saved until the day of selection comes, and they have been selected. They cannot judge themselves. Some people imagine that when they have believed the Gospel and been baptized, they have done all—that they have secured the prize. They have not secured the prize at all ; they have but entered the lists for the competition to secure it. The attainment of it is contingent upon faithful stewardship ; upon how we act in the position in which the Gospel has placed us. Christ comes forth to look at the company gathered as guests for the wedding, and makes his selection from amongst them upon the principle of faithfulness. So that instead of persons sitting down with folded arms the moment they come to believe the truth, they ought to realize increased incentive to diligence ; for only those who are *diligent* will make their calling and election sure. "Be ye steadfast, unmovable," says Paul, "*always abounding* in the work of the Lord." That is the motto, the policy, the spirit, the principle of the apostolic system, "*always abounding*." It is the great idea animating all who are truly obedient to the Gospel. These are not those who get hold of the truth, and put it in their pockets, as their religion ; and then start out to do just as they were doing before. There are numerous striking examples of this kind in the world around. There are people making a profession of religion whom, from their ways of life, you would never know to be religious at all ; they are entirely devoted to the schemes which recommend themselves to the natural mind. Those schemes, in their several departments, are what are considered creditable and excellent by the world. It is considered a very praiseworthy thing for a man to be industrious in the accumulation of money for himself, that his own position may be secure in this evil world. It is considered a legitimate object of life for a man to labour diligently to be rich now in this present time, that he may have a fine house to live in, and an honourable position in society. Men show amazing diligence, actually night and day depriving themselves oft-times of rest and leisure, in developing business interests. A great deal of genius and a great deal of energy are expended in the promotion of purely temporal concerns. It is a kind of enthusiasm which, if attended with success, encourages its votary to wider and wider efforts. The tendency of the world is to absorb the mind more and more. If a man once yield to the service of himself in this way,

it is like getting into the suction of a maelstrom. It is a dangerous thing to put Christ out of account for a moment. The disposition to serve ourselves is instinctive to the animal man ; it is one of the primitive instincts implanted for our self-preservation. Regulated by divine law, it has its place, but if this instinct is allowed to be the lord of our life, we get into an evil bondage from which it is difficult to deliver ourselves, and which will assuredly alienate from us the regard of Christ. It is a foolish policy. The crisis will come at last, and it may come any moment. The slave of instinct has to give it up, and everything. He has to lie down and die ; he has to take time to do that, although he could spare so little for Christ ; and then, where are the wealth and the honour, and all the fine things that he has set his heart upon ? All gone ; everything left behind—absolutely everything ! He goes to corruption ; he descends to the grave without a hope. Having laid up no treasure in heaven, he is buried a spiritual bankrupt, for whom there is no prospect but tribulation and wrath and anguish ! That is a fine harvest for a man to reap ! That is a fine result for a man to work so hard, and so diligently, and so skilfully for ! Dangerous ! dangerous ! dangerous ! to put off Christ with the idea that we are going to do differently by and by. We don't know whether we will have a "by and by" to do differently in. The only time we can reckon upon is the present ; and that time is not our own at all if we are Christ's. If we are as the worms, we are, of course, at liberty to spend our time as the worms, burrowing and burrowing in the earth. No one thinks a worm acts foolishly. It fulfils the law of its being and ends in nothing. So it will be with the human worms, with this distinction, that such as have known the way of life, and treat God with this contempt, it would be better they had never been born. In how different a case stand those who are truly Christ's. They work as well as the business worm, but their labour tends to higher ends. The result of their work is not so immediately apparent, but, ultimately, it is more real and lasting. The sinner has not brains sufficient to see that although the man of Christ has scattered his seed now, it will return to him a hundredfold when the sinner's little handful has gone for ever. The man of Christ will secure all that the sinner aims to have, and more. The sinner loses life ; Christ's servants will have it without end, whereas the sinner can only get a little. Energy of body and mind ! The sinner, in his healthiest moments, never dreamt of the power that will mantle the glorified saint who will be made incorruptible. The sinner has a hankering for beauty but will, at last, embrace rottenness and corruption, while the saint is resplendent with a comeliness never approached by the fairest of earth's daughters. In fact they will possess everything because their Captain is the proprietor of the whole earth ; to him it belongs. God made it not in vain, but for a noble purpose, which centres in one man, the Son of His love, whom He has constituted "heir of all things." When his glory shall be revealed, the time will have come for the saint to reap the harvest, sown now in weakness and tears. To be "glorified together with *him*" means more than heart can now conceive. It is a far more exceeding (than the present) and eternal weight of glory. The sinner racks his brains and spends his strength in scraping together what appears a wondrous amount of wealth. Suppose he accumulates £10,000. Poor creature ! In getting this, he has sacrificed himself, God, and everything ; and after

SEASONS OF COMFORT

all his trouble, his £10,000 cannot save him. Decay sets in : nature fails ; and a coffin is ordered. The labours of a saint are to a very different end. By reason of following Christ, he has scarcely more chance of his £10,000 than of the crown of England. His exertions are otherwise directed, but when he plants his foot above ground at the resurrection, and finds himself in the kingdom of God, what will £10,000 be to him then ? As the small dust in the balance. The good opinion of people which the prosperous sinner gets and the saint loses, is worth little on account of the worthlessness of the people. But there is an honour worth having : the commendation of God, and the approbation of those who fear His name. The respectable sinners would not be thought unfashionable for a fortune. Foolish people ! There are not many wise people in the world. Those only are wise who give themselves to this one thing, who will consent to forgo the good opinion of this foolish world for Christ's sake. It is not pleasant but wise. Wise things are sometimes disagreeable for a time, but sweetness comes at last. It is mortifying to be considered and called an infidel and other evil things. But wait a bit. It is good advice never to judge a thing till you see the end of it. It is a wise maxim which says, "Fools and children should never see a thing half done." The fools of this world only see Christ's work half done and are deceived. See the other half, and you will see the saint will stand in the good opinion of a regenerated world, invested in the "glory and honour" which with immortality, will be the portion of those who, by a patient continuance in well-doing in the face of a frowning world earn the divine approbation. What is honour ? Being made mention of among worthy persons as a worthy person ! How highly a man of the world feels complimented if, in a large public meeting, his name is mentioned with respect. If the hall were empty, the mention of his name would involve no honour. The dying echoes would be a mockery. Or if his name were shouted in a room full of cows, he would fail to realize honour in the situation. The value of honour depends upon the character of those bestowing it. Apply this principle to the time under our consideration when the generation of the race (as it is termed) stands revealed, when the men and women approved of God in all ages, emerge from the death-slumber in which they now repose, to be "made up as jewels," or organized as God's precious ones for God's purpose on earth ; those who served Him in their day and generation, in spite of evil report, and hard usage, as witness the prophets ; when all those are assembled, a multitude to look at which no man can number ; each one a jewel, a gem, a precious vessel of all wisdom and excellence. What an exalted honour to be mentioned in their presence with approbation, and in the presence of higher than they ; for the angels are to be attendants upon the great occasion. Jesus cometh with myriads of them ; they are put in subjection to him, as Peter tells us. And what does Jesus tell us in reference to the relation of his people to these bright intelligences in the day of his glory ? "He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess in the presence of the holy angels." The sinner's honour is a mere flash in the pan compared to this ; it is nothing at all in the eternal reckoning. It is a momentary affair, is soon over, and not worth the purchase. Eighteen hundred years ago, time was as really present to those then living. We are eighteen hundred years farther on ; and by and by, time will be 1,800 years still further on : and where then will be the

little moths and flies and worms, whose flitting and buzzing and crawling now engage the admiration and attention of the world? Where will be their little honours, and fever heats, and ambitions, and gold scrapings? Over and done with for ever. It is not so with Christ's people; their honour will be for ever *enduring*, for they are to be made immortal. There will be no end to their lives, no termination to the glory of their position. They are for ever and ever. Their glory is everlasting. They are to be permanent tenants of God's house, for "the son dwelleth ever," Paul says, and they are sons. All the others are mere servants in a low sense, fulfilling a little part in the great scheme of God. If we are "children," we are heirs with Christ—heirs of all things.

How indescribably glorious then it will be to enter the presence of our great Captain, in whom we can rejoice to the utmost bounds of exultation, upon whose image our eyes can rest without idolatry, for, as he himself says, it is the Father's will "that all men should honour the Son *even as they honour the Father.*" It may be truly said that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love him. But *God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit.*" That revelation is written, and we walk in the light of it, and sit in the hearing of it when we gather round the table thus, to call to our remembrance the great Captain of our salvation.

The Character of God

Construction of the Bible.—Its diversified character.—Nature and the Bible both having the stamp of Divinity.—Character of God.—His goodness.—What might have been.—Heaven and earth bear witness to the divine beneficence.—His promises.—Praise.—Nineveh, Jonah.—An artless narrative.—Mosaic tabernacle a symbol of friendship.—The Ninevites forgiven without sacrifice.—Forgiveness unto eternal life requires sacrifice.—Why?—No substitution.—Kindness and forgiveness in harmony with righteousness.—The requirement of sacrifice not inconsistent with goodness.—The only thing that can separate from God's goodness.

THE longer we are acquainted with the Scriptures the more do we appreciate the perfect wisdom of the plan upon which they have been constructed. We find them so constituted that we can read them year's end to year's end, with an interest that never wanes, and a pleasure that never satiates. If we had had the making of the Bible, this would not have been the case. We should have produced a book so precise in its definitions, so methodical in its arrangement, so guarded against repetitions, and so limited in demeanour, that one acquaintance would have exhausted our interest. Instead of this, we have a book so diverse in its composition, though uniform in its design; so loose in its style, though accurate in its statements; so incessant in its assertion of first principles, though free from prolixity; that we read it with renewed and growing interest each year of our acquaintance. In this respect it is like Nature as contrasted with art. Man can make beautiful things:

SEASONS OF COMFORT

but his productions fail to satisfy as Nature satisfies ; their beauty is petty, limited and superficial. Nature's beauty is thorough and inimitable, whether it be the structure of a flake of snow, the organization of a plant or meanest insect under the microscope, or the stupendous revolutions of the starry firmament. Nature and the Bible both bear the impress of Divinity. There is one great plan, and on the basis of that plan, infinite diversity of beautiful detail. There is a unity in all parts of the Bible, and yet a certain diversity which maintains the interest of the persevering reader ever fresh and fair. "Line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little and there a little." This is its plan as defined by itself. It explains the fact that we never meet on the basis of Bible reading without having something new to interest brought under our notice.

This morning furnishes a new illustration. We have two chapters before us (Jonah 4 and Heb. 9) as different as possible one from another, and yet both converging from different points upon a common subject, and that a subject the sublimest of all—the character of God. This is the foundation of all well-being—present or to come. We are so familiar with that, we are apt to take it as a matter of course. Let us exercise our thoughts upon it, so that we may awake to a full sense of its joyfulness. Let us look at it in this way : before we were born, we knew nothing about the constitution of the universe. For anything we knew, and for any necessity that existed so far as we were concerned, we might have come into being to discover that the universe was in the grasp of a monster, whose delight consisted in producing painful excitement in all the subordinate creatures of his power. We might have found God who made us, a devil to afflict us, and His great house of heaven and earth an abode of deformity and despair. What could we have said against it ? Nothing. We could but have accepted facts beyond our control. We might have raved and cursed, to the delight of the fiendish contriver of our misery ; we might have wailed with despairing agony, that God was not a beneficent being, and that existence was not a delight ; but we could have altered nothing, nor made out a case of reasonable grumbling.

A picture like this helps us to rejoice in that fact stated by Jonah : "I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil." We behold with unspeakable relief and admiration that, subject to vanity though we are by reason of rebellion against the Most Blessed and Only Potentate, yet we live in a glorious sphere, whose ordinances are based in the highest beneficence. The grandeur of the glittering firmament on high ; the overpowering glory of the splendid sun in the heavens ; the softness and benignance of "the blue ethereal sky" ; the pleasant play of light in its infinite variations of colour and shade ; the invigorating rush of the healthful breeze ; the charming fragrance of opening flowers ; the beauty of earth's variegated carpet ; the pleasure of every healthful function—in fact, the whole paraphernalia of being, reveals the fact that the creating, sustaining, and presiding Genius of heaven and earth is the good and wise and gracious Being revealed to the fathers of the house of Israel. When to all these we add the promise of life everlasting, a nature incorruptible, society joyful and ennobling, a kingdom unfading, we can see what reason we have for joining—and that rapturously, too—in the exultation of David : "I will extol thee, my God, O King ; I

will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee ; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever."

The goodness of the character of God comes out in a way that all can easily see in the case of Nineveh. A large city given over to wicked life, like all large cities—and small ones, too, for the matter of that—is threatened with destruction in forty days. The occupant of the throne hears the threat (proclaimed by Jonah) ; orders and takes part in a fast and humiliation in which all the citizens join. Their penitence moves Jehovah to pity, and He suspends the execution of the sentence, to the mortification of Jonah, who feels he will be personally discredited as the herald of a vengeance that never came—an incident by the way which is one among hundreds which prove the genuineness of the narrative, for an inventor writing to sustain the credit of the prophets would never have invented such a story. Jonah's vexation, and his reference to Jehovah's well-known placability as a reason why he shirked his duty in the first instance, are features in an artless narrative of truth, and bring out the kindness of God in a very practical and matter-of-fact way.

The chapter in Hebrews brings out the same lesson in a different way. In this, we are brought into contact with the Mosaic tabernacle and the service of sacrifice connected with it ; and we are taught that these were but the preliminary " example and shadow of heavenly things "—the things from heaven centring in Christ. We look first at one and then at the other, and find the same evidence of the graciousness of God. The Mosaic system constituted a meeting-point between God and man—a place where God was approached in worship and supplication and friendship. When we realize that this meeting-point was solely of God's contrivance, and that it was appointed for a sinful nation who deserved no forbearance at His hands, we realize the fact that was proclaimed on Sinai, that Jehovah is " merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant in goodness and in truth." And what shall we say when we see " God in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them " ?—what but join in the exclamation of John, " Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us ! " " Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins." " God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

But here there is a point which has arrested the attention and excited the deep thought of reflecting men : How is it that there is this difference between the kindness shown to Nineveh and the kindness shown to us ; that whereas the men of Nineveh were forgiven without sacrifice, believers in the Gospel are called upon to recognize the fact that " without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins " ? The truth has cleared away this difficulty, though some, who once knew the truth (at least, in a measure), would restore the difficulty by their " renunciationism." The truth enables us to perceive that in spirit, there is no difference between the case of Nineveh and the case of believers in the Gospel ; and that the difference in form is due to the difference between the goodness bestowed in one case and in the other. The Ninevites humbled themselves absolutely before God, in fasting and clothing themselves in sackcloth. This supplied the one condition which He himself has defined as the one that secures His

favourable consideration : " To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." Consequently, He relented towards them, and remitted the penalty of that immediate destruction which their prolonged wickedness had nearly brought upon them. This was the extent of the goodness bestowed : exemption from sudden death.

In the case of believers in Christ, the goodness is of a very different nature. They are called to the fellowship of the Father, and that fellowship an eternal fellowship, and involving a participation in His incorruptibility and deathlessness. Now, considering who they are, members of a race condemned for sin at the start, and guilty each one of " many offences," and considering the exalted nature of the privilege of friendship and companionship with God, it is no marvel that a special and adequate form of broken-heartedness and fear should be provided for them. God is great and holy ; and He receives not sinners to His eternal society without the utmost recognition on their part of His position of prerogative and their position of no claim—yea, worse, deserving death. Hence, His requirement of the shedding of blood, as the basis of propitiation. But we are too far astray for Him to accept even this at our hands. Therefore, in the Son of Mary—His own Son—He gives us one in whom He will accept it, and in whom He has accepted it, for " by his own blood he entered once into the holy place, *having obtained eternal redemption* " (" for us " is not in the original, and is excluded by the " voice " of the verb—the middle—which concentrates the application on himself). Yet this Son of Mary, and Son of God, was one of the sufferers from the evil that sin has brought into the world, though without sin as regards his character. His mission as the propitiation required this combination in harmony with the principle to be exemplified in his death, namely, the declaration of the righteousness of God as the basis of His forbearance in the remission of our sins (Rom. 3 : 25, 26). In the righteous Son of David, the law of sin and death was destroyed by death and resurrection, and now in him is " the law of the spirit of life " established in harmony with the indispensable requirement of God's supremacy and righteousness. In him now is life for all who will come unto God by him, morally participating in his crucifixion, and sharing his death in the act of baptism. God will grant forgiveness to all who come to Him in the way appointed. It is no case of substitution or debt-paying, which would obscure the righteousness and the goodness of God. It is a case of God approaching us in kindness, and giving us, by His own arrangement, one from among ourselves in whom His " law is magnified and made honourable " (Isa. 42 : 21), that by his blood we may be washed from our sins, in the sense of being forgiven unto life eternal for his sake ; and that of his righteousness we may partake in the assumption of his name.

The fact that sacrifice is required in order to gain life eternal, is therefore not inconsistent with the goodness which God showed to the Ninevites without sacrifice. It is rather the form which His goodness takes in a higher matter, and required by its greater importance. It is the same goodness manifested in both cases. It is the same God who shines in all parts of the Bible. " What shall we then say to these things ? If God be for us, who can be against us ? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things ? Who

shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . . I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8 : 31-39).

There is one thing, and one thing only, can separate us from this love. It is specified in the words of Isaiah to Israel: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God." God will have no regard for those who forget Him or neglect His commandments. Those who sink into a state of self-service, who live exclusively for their own comfort and well-being, who let God slip from their practical recognitions; His word from their studies; His honour from their concern; His commandments from their lives, will awake to find that where life and death, and men, and angels, and heaven and earth, were powerless to interpose an obstacle between them and the friendly regard of the Almighty, their own folly has done it without further remedy. God is love; but our God is also a consuming fire. He will not be mocked; He will not be put off with the fag-ends of our service. He demands the whole heart and the whole life; and he is not his own friend who refuses the call: for there will come a time when the man who has served himself will find he has served a master who can only pay him at last with tribulation, and anguish, and death; while the man who obeys the divine call will at the same period discover that in making God his portion, he has secured the joyful eternal inheritance of all things.

Reading the Scriptures

The Word written for our learning.—Daily reading of it a necessity.—The necessary motive, the fear of God.—The state of mind that will lead to the study of the Bible.—A reaction.—Another view.—The Bible God's representative.—A man's treatment of the Bible, his treatment of God.—Coming consequences.—God great.—The lessons of the law.—Treat His Word with attention.—Difficulties and their overcoming.

THERE is an unexplored depth of reality in the saying, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning." All consent to the saying as a true one, but only a few go far enough in the process of "learning" from what has been written. Even these will never get to the end of the process while in the flesh. They will always be discovering some new force in exhortations they have been familiar with from infancy. Our progress in this respect, however, will depend entirely on our compliance with the divine exhortation to seek wisdom as for hid treasure. In many respects, the wisdom of God that is communicated in His word is hidden. It is accessible only to those who dig, and this digging to be serviceable must be a continuous process. It must not be done in fits and starts. It must

SEASONS OF COMFORT

be constant, patient, and reverential, a daily feeding on the manna from heaven. The systematic and painful efforts of mere scholarship—the spasmodic attempts of what is generally understood by the term “study”—may be to the real work of upbuilding in the word what the chemist’s analysis of flour is to the process of nutrition—clever but useless. Such a mode of treating the word of God will leave a man unacquainted with nearly all the riches it contains. A daily, habitual, thankful, reverential, prayerful, and orderly converse with the holy oracles will uncover to the mind irresistible, almost inexpressible, evidences of their truth, and a fund of significance that will remain utterly unknown to the careless, irregular, spasmodic, or merely scholarly reader.

But to accomplish and continue in this mode of intercourse, requires a species of motive to which the mere scholar is a stranger. A man must fear God and realize his own insignificance and dependence. He must feel hungry before he will desire to feed on the word in this unremitting manner. He must be non-content with himself and things as they are. His affections must be operative on heavenly, and not on earthly, things. He must, in fact, have made considerable attainments in the kind of spiritual education which is implied in saintship. The Gospel, as seed to the soil, must have germinated and sprung up before it can bring forth this excellent fruit of the Spirit—this continual delight in the statutes, commandments and word of the living God—the yearning thirst for communion expressed by David, when he said, “My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord : my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” What does this mean but that a man must not only know that there is a God, but must love Him and be filled with admiration of His infallible and eternal excellencies ; that he must not only know that he himself is a mortal, but must have such a living sense of the fact, as to be in a constant temper of modesty and extreme reverence towards God, trembling at His word ; that he must not only be aware that there has been a Christ in the world, but realize that there is a Christ now, and that we, having yielded ourselves to his purchase, are no longer our own, but his who lived and died for us ? Only this rich indwelling of the word of Christ will enable a man to perseveringly discern the excellence of the word of God, and the absolute insignificance of all present things, though they may be very unfortunate of our attention and striking in their impressions upon the senses. Only such will be found, day and night, giving the word of God that place in the economy of life which it ought to have.

The reading of the Bible and the appreciation of it will react productively one upon the other. Read the word and you will appreciate it ; appreciate it and you will desire it, and seek the comfort that is to be found in reading it. And thus, as in every vital process, there will be a dual action which will preserve life.

But there is a view of the matter outside of the word and outside of man, because there is a God outside the word and outside of man. The word is the only form in which the name and honour of God have a visible place among men at the present time. His temple is in the dust, His nation scattered, His kingdom destroyed. His word remains, and he hath magnified it above all His name. It is in the hands of the nations. It is the principal and most numerously multiplied book in the world. It is everywhere His

representative. The Bible in the house is God in the house. The Bible in a man's life is God in a man's life. Where people place the Bible, they place God. The place it demands is the heart—the throne. With nothing less will God be satisfied. Do you neglect it, you neglect God. Do you allow the affairs of house, or business, or friends to ride over it, to displace it from the first position, to put it in the corner, to keep it hidden, neglected, disregarded? Then is God cast behind your back, and great is your danger. A voice of thunder would not be too loud to rouse you from your folly. You say you have no time to read. The plea is absolutely inadmissible. You take time to eat and drink, and this is the most important kind of eating and drinking. You will have to take time to be ill some of these days. Death will rap at the door, and he won't ask you if you have time to attend to him. Christ will stand in the earth one of these days, and what about your family, your house, your business then? You will want to turn to wisdom in a hurry, but wisdom will fly far from you. You will want to seek God with your whole heart, but He will not be found of you. So has God arranged things, that He will cause every one to find the fruit of his ways. "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets. . . . How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you . . . Blessed are they that keep my ways. Hear instruction, and be wise, and refuse it not. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord. But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death."

But if ye heed not her gentle entreaties—if ye persist in putting her off, that ye may attend to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life, hoping dimly and indefinitely that some day all will be well—hear ye your own doom declared beforehand by the same gentle voice: "Because I have called, and ye refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh; when your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you. Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but shall not find me: for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord: they would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices."

God has declared, "I am a great King" (Mal. 1:14). He demands on this ground to be honoured, and to have the first place in the heart, and the best of all we have to offer. All the ceremonial appointments of the law were intended to teach this lesson. No one was allowed to approach the sanctuary except those appointed, and those only in the appointed way, on pain of death. No offering was accepted with a blemish, or hurt, or imperfection. All uncleanness required purgation by sacrifice. Holiness and majesty were continually impressed on Israel as appertaining to Him in the highest degree. The lesson in its individual application is unmistakable. Jesus brings it home in the words, "Thou shalt love the Lord

SEASONS OF COMFORT

thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." His own demand is "My son, give me thine heart." He demands the highest place in all our affairs, which is His reasonable place. Let us render the service He requires. His word is in our houses. Don't let us insult Him by giving our feeblest moments to the reading of it. Don't let us wait till all our energies are worn out, and our faculties impaired in attending upon the affairs of the natural man. Don't let us sit down to the Bible when nature is exhausted, and sleep hovers on the eyelids. Let us give the best time of the day. It is a matter of contrivance. There are difficulties, but difficulties can be overcome. Where there is a will, there is a way. Besides, who knows but our difficulties are God's tests. He may want to prove us—to see and let us see whether we will honour Him or not. It is no new thing for God to leave a man that He may see all that is in his heart. Therefore, our increasing business—our growing affairs—may be a part of the machinery by which our probation is accomplished. If we resist the clamours of the flesh—if, notwithstanding the pressure of worldly affairs, we turn aside daily in reading, prayer, and meditation, we overcome; but, if, on the contrary, we are carried before the stream, and leave God behind, we are overcome, and will awake sooner or later to a sense of our great folly.

If we do our duty in this matter, we shall be assisted. This is matter of promise. If we are attentive to God, He will be attentive to us. "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." The converse is true. Neglect God and He will allow you to fall. There have been many illustrations of this in history. One of them is mentioned in the chapter read this morning (Rom. 1 : 28) : "Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, *God gave them over to a reprobate mind.*" All nations were related, in the first instance, to the fountain of divine knowledge through Noah, but they slighted God, honouring themselves, each other, and their own affairs, like the multitudes of our own day, and God departed from them, and gave them over to the reprobateness of mind which is manifest in all the sculptures of antiquity and the state of man universally. The Jews were favoured as no nation ever was. Jehovah says, "As a girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the Lord; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory : *but they would not hear.*" What was the consequence? "Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land, even the kings that sit upon David's throne, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, *with drunkenness* (that is mental confusion; the result of the wine of His wrath). And I will dash one against another, even the fathers and the sons together, saith the Lord : I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy them" (Jer. 13 : 14). "Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes" (Isa. 6 : 10). This was Israel's punishment for neglecting God. When Christ came, he cloaked his wisdom in parables, that they might remain in their ignorance, and become subject to the judgment of God. Yet even then, his teaching was plain enough to be understood by those who gave close attention, and gave that respect to God which is His due. And he made them understand that the principle exemplified in the national blindness would operate in individual cases. He said (Mark 4 : 24) : "Unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath,

to him shall be given : and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath." So that any one earnestly attending to what Christ taught, would be helped to understand ; while those who stood contemptuously and self-sufficiently apart, doing dishonour to God, would be deprived of what wisdom they had, in being left to their evil ways. The lesson is, that those who neglect or hold loosely what they have, are in danger of being deserted by God, and led into ways that shall be for hurt. The principle was again exemplified in the first generation of Gospel believers. These were greatly privileged in having the teaching of the Spirit visibly in their midst ; but like the Israelites who came out of Egypt under Moses, they grew accustomed to marvels, and conceived the idea that these things were in some way their right ; that the apostles were only fellow-partakers of a common benefit, and had no more superiority among men than themselves. Hence arose false apostles. Many false brethren crept in, to whom the others listened. Many followed their pernicious ways. They dabbled in doctrines and disputed greatly about them, but it was the perverse disputing of men of corrupt minds. They received not the love of the truth. What was the consequence ? Jesus hinted at this in his message to the seven churches, that he would remove the candlestick out of its place. Paul's forcible declaration is : "*For this cause* God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie." As He had done with Israel, so He would do with the highly privileged communities founded by the apostles ; because they departed from the reverential heedfulness that God demands, and began to honour and please themselves, He would fill them with drunkenness, that is, with the mental confusion resulting from imbibing the false principles that He caused to be diffused through the instrumentality of evil men and seducers. And so it has come to pass, and the Christendom of today is the standing monument of the faithlessness of the first century, and the living illustration of the fact, that if men disregard Him, He will leave them to ways of folly and death ; even to ways that they may imagine right ; for, as Solomon says, " There is a way that seemeth right unto a man ; but the end thereof are the ways of death."

Now we stand related to the same principle, for God is the same for evermore. Do not let us imagine that when the nations of antiquity, and the Jewish race, and the first generation of believers, were given over to reprobation because they dishonoured God by a lukewarm and half-hearted attendance upon His word, that we shall fare any better if we offer Him a like insult. God is great and we are small. God is eternal, and we are of yesterday ; God upholdeth all things, and we uphold nothing, but are ourselves upholden by Him every moment. Most reasonable therefore it is that we choose His honour and His fear as the mainspring of our life. And most profitable shall we find it for ourselves. If we commit our way to Him, magnifying His word as He has magnified it, giving it first place in the economy of our lives, He will guide our steps to a greater enlargement of spiritual attainments, strengthening us with all might in the inner man, and filling us with the knowledge of His will. But if we hold the treasure of His wisdom with a loose hand, He will forsake us and leave us exposed to influences and circumstances that will be to our destruction. We are not without illustration of this in our day. We have seen many who, though they knew the truth, were not walking in the love of it, but in the love of

themselves and the things connected with the present life—we have seen them swept from their moorings by a wind of doctrine which has been permitted to blow upon them to their destruction. “Who is wise, and he shall understand these things? prudent, and he shall know them? For the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein.”

Waiting for Christ

A time of indefinite waiting.—Effects of delay.—No delay in the true sense.—Delay of expectation only.—The Lord's time fixed, but only its whereabouts revealed.—The time of the end already come, but not the end yet.—Some of the advantages of delay.—The way to use it and make it pass lightsomely.—Acquaintance with God's plans.—Patience the result of wisdom.—The difference knowledge makes to our views of things.—Right view of the present.—Present experience one of endurance.—Apparent indifference of God.—Impressions of Jeremiah, Malachi, and David on the subject.—Desolateness of the children of God.—The coming dawn of gladness.—God's encouragement to those who fear Him.—The comfort Christ has given them.—The signs of the Lord's nearness.—Patience for a little longer.

ALL Christ's allusions to the circumstances of his second coming pre-suppose a time of indefinite waiting on the part of those servants whom he finds alive in the earth. They discern the signs of their time, yet they know neither the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh. They recognize the time of the end, but have to wait longer than they supposed they would when they girded their loins and set their lights burning. This unexpected delay caused some to relax their vigilance, and to say, “My Lord delayeth his coming.” On others, though hope deferred maketh the heart sick, it produces not this effect; they endure to the end. They are the class contemplated in the words of Christ when he says, “Blessed are those servants whom their Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching.” Their existence is distinctly recognized under the three-frog and Euphratean signs of the sixth vial, in the words, “Behold, I come as a thief; blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments.”

The present time answers to all these peculiarities. The leading events of the age all tell us that the Lord is at the door. The three-and-a-half times of the Papal Horn are expired. We have expected the Lord's re-appearing at the exact close of that period. We have seen the mark of its close in the altered position of the Papacy, but the Lord yet tarries; and we assemble this morning, still watching and waiting. The delay tries us, but destroys us not. It is no delay in the true sense. That is, there is no delay or slackness from the Lord's point of view. With him the time is fixed to a day, and his coming will not be a day after the time appointed. The idea of “delay” relates to our expectations. The neighbourhood of the day has been revealed, but not the day itself. We had expected the arrival of that day as soon as its neighbourhood was reached. Time has shown us that the end,

and *the time of the end* are two different things, though belonging one to the other. The latter we have reached : the former we yet wait to see. This delay in relation to expectation is one of the foreseen characteristics of the end ; how otherwise does the Lord, at his appearing, find some who say, " My Lord *delayeth* his coming " ? It is a delay for which some of us—yea, all of us—may be thankful. If the Lord had come as soon as some of us were expecting, many who are now rejoicing in the light would have been overtaken in darkness. He would have been here before the invitation to the marriage supper had reached them. And to none of us would the day have come so acceptably as it will after a prolonged season of works and faith, and patience. Not that our poor works can commend us to the grace of God ; for Christ has instructed us to say, after we have done all we can, " Behold, we are unprofitable servants ; we have done that which it was our duty to do " (Luke 17 : 10). But there is a satisfaction in the answer of a good conscience towards God, and this satisfaction will be greater after years of toil and waiting than if we had been ushered into the presence of the glorified Jesus immediately we had begun the race.

The waiting will seem long or short, according as we furnish the inner man or otherwise. Time is long to the vacant-minded, and is pretty much in the ratio of the vacancy. To a child, a day is of great length, and a year an incalculable period. With men and women of uncultivated mind, the weeks hang heavy. Time flies quickly with those who are wisely busy. To God, the fountain of all strength and wisdom, a thousand years in His sight are as yesterday when it is past.

If we store our mind by reading and reflection, we shall be enabled to realize how short are the years as they fly, and how brief would be the delay of even a whole life-time. The man who neglects the food of wisdom becomes impoverished and lean in his spiritual man, and too weak to bear the load of present deprivation or to endure the weariness of waiting. God's plans are on a great scale, and of slow growth. If we make ourselves familiar with what is past, we shall understand what is present, and be able to wait patiently what is future. But if we restrict ourselves to what is now present, our minds will be dwarfed and overpowered. The things of the passing moment and the things of the surface destroy, if our impressions and motives are drawn from them only. Wisdom lies deep. You have to dig for it : sweet when found, but hard to reach. God has arranged it so ; and wisdom, when found, tells you that it is wise to have it so. A fool and a wise man will look on the same objects, but be very differently impressed. A Hottentot looks up to the sky at night and sees a roof with lamps fixed to it in a planless way ; the philosopher beholds the fathomless expanse and worlds in accurate array. So the surface reader looks back and sees BIBLE HISTORY as a scholastic abstraction, and the names of Abraham, David, and others, as the chance celebrities of capricious fortune ; while the daily attendant at the gates of wisdom discerns the living perspective of the divine work in the earth, covering even the present hour, and sweeping forward into a future bright with glory. To such, the past is real and the future a fact, and the present, with its troubles, patiently and willingly borne. To them the waiting for Christ is no empty phrase, but words expressive of a palpable and daily-felt reality. To such as live in the present, you talk cant if you speak of the present life of the saints as a pilgrimage, just as thanks-

SEASONS OF COMFORT

giving to God and the recognition of His will is cant to those with whom God is only a name. But wisdom is justified of all her children, and will clothe them with honour at last.

Meanwhile their lot is one of deprivation and sorrow. It has always been so ; “ come out of great tribulation,” is the description of them all in their glorified state. This helps us to endure the tribulation while it lasts ; not that we have much to bear compared with some, but what we do have to bear, is what every member of the family has suffered before us, more or less. The apparent indifference of God, for instance, to what is going on—the prosperity of the scorner and the casting down of the righteous—the absence of God’s visible operation and the triumph of those who regard Him not—are features of our affliction which distressed the beloved of God in ancient times no less than ourselves now. Thus we find Jeremiah lamenting : “ Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper ? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously ? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root ; they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit : thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins.” Thus also, Malachi : “ And now we call the proud happy ; yea, they that work wickedness are set up ; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.” Thus also in the Psalm read this morning, wherein, by the Spirit, David and David’s Lord and Son speak together : “ Why standest thou afar off, O Lord ? Why hidest thou thyself in times of trouble ? The wicked in his pride doth persecute the poor : let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined.” We are apt to think of David, and especially of the Son of David, as unsubject to the weariness which we experience from the absence of the visible working of God. We are liable to imagine them as having lived in a continual joy of God, undepressed by the triumph of ungodliness in the earth. A careful consideration of their words will disabuse us of the idea, and help us to feel them our brethren in tribulation, who have drunk of the same cup of bitterness, and exercised themselves in the same weariness of waiting and seeking after God. They felt as if God stood afar off : as if God hid Himself in time of trouble. This was to them a sorrow ; a continual burden, as the similar experience is to us. The anguish of their hearts sought vent as ours will. They spent much time in prayer. They asked their Rock “ why ” He apparently forsook them. The breathings of their sorrow are recorded that all the children of God may understand and be comforted. In all their generations, they feel alike oftentimes desolate from the same cause ; but by these they are taught to forbear to think that some strange thing has happened unto them. They become enlightened to perceive that so is the will of God that they should have a season of solitariness, in which they wait for God and seek Him with their whole heart, under the sweet power of the hope which God has linked with the sorrow. God has not said, “ Seek ye my face in vain.” On the contrary, He has said, “ Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” And this finding of Him is the finding of all that the soul can desire, for every good and perfect gift comes from Him, but to everything there is “ a season and a time.” “ Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart ” ; but the reaping is in the day of harvest. For this they have to “ wait.” The righteous SHALL be glad in the Lord. Now they are sorrowful, though “ always rejoicing ” in the midst of their

sorrow. Everything is against them at present ; but, like David, they "encourage themselves in the Lord their God" ; for He is their Rock and the source of all the good for which they hope in Him. He asks them to be comforted : "Hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law ; fear ye not the reproach of men, neither be ye afraid of their revilings. For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool : but my righteousness shall be for ever, and my salvation from generation to generation. . . . I, even I, am he that comforteth you : who art thou, that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass ? "

The prophet was commanded : "Comfort ye my people." So Jesus said : "Blessed are ye that mourn, for ye shall be comforted." There is a comfort now in prospect of the substantial comfort that God will bestow in the blessing and exaltation of His chosen in the day of Christ. All the groanings of the saints that the Spirit has preserved in the word are mingled with this comfort ; and by the same comfort may we comfort our hearts in the present time of waiting and patience. God is observant of all our ways ; and God never forgets. Christ's eye is over all the ecclesias, "trying the reins and hearts," that every man may receive according to his ways. Therefore, our tears and our sighs, at the present desolation, are not lost, though unseen of men. Our troubles, in this respect, are pleasing to Him. In due time He will wipe away the tears and fill our mouth with laughter. In this respect we learn to rejoice even in tribulation. Those who live in pleasure at such a time as this are dead while they live. Those who for peace have great bitterness in the righteous ways of God, will yet have cause to sing, "Thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption : thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back." Therefore may they even now obey the commands addressed by Jesus to those who suffer in the way of righteousness : "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad."

Especially in our day may we cultivate this gladness. The signs of the times tell us that we are rapidly nearing the time of the dead when God shall give reward to His servants the prophets : when all who fear His name, small and great, shall awake together to the joyful celebration of His praise, and the execution of His judgment upon the nations. The frog sign has been the notable fact of the diplomatic world for 25 years ; the Euphrates is drying at an advancing speed that no human contrivance can arrest ; the Papal Horn lies powerless in the dust ; the Jews are everywhere rising from the down-treading of centuries. The ear that can hearken hears the voice ringing through the world, "Behold, I come as a thief." A little more waiting for God ; a little more patience ; a little more endurance of evil and continuance in well-doing ; and the hour will arrive. The moment will be here when we shall suddenly be confronted by the great fact that the Lord is in the earth. Great will be the joy of the saints at the announcement, though they mingle trembling with their fear.

Spiritual Ignorance and Woman's Position

Paul's harsh words on the subject.—Their application to hypocritical critics.—A test exposing the spiritual pretenders.—The whole counsel of God VERSUS the smattering of pious uncertainty.—Modern application of the principle.—No Paul to apply it, but the word of God and good sense.—The wise course for intelligent and valiant men.—Misapplication of Scripture in a contrary direction.—Strong and weak brethren.—The former to bear with the latter, but not to compromise the doctrines and commandments of Christ.—Examples.—Ignorant whims and false doctrines to be resisted.—Forbearance and faithfulness must always go together.—The position of sisters.—Wrong and right views.—Putting women too high and too low.—The scriptural medium.—The illustration of Phæbe, Priscilla, and others.—Apostolic recognition of woman's place.—Few fit to fill it.—Pots and pans in the hands of intelligence and worth.—The helpmeetship of woman.—Boorish doctrines.—Martha and Mary, and Judas.—Trying women.—Not sisters in truth.—The nuisances of creation.—Noble daughters.—The relation of the sexes in the age to come.

“If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.” These words will seem harsh to many, but they are Paul's words, and like all the words of Paul, whether harsh or gentle, they bring with them a lesson for the wise which makes it worth while to consider them.

They were uttered by Paul in reference to a class of critics who set themselves up as judges and censors of Paul's course, without being competent to fulfil their self-imposed function; being, in fact, pious hypocrites, perhaps without knowing it. These critics considered themselves to be spiritual: wherefore he says, “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. *But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant*” (1 Cor. 14 : 38). This challenge was doubtless humiliating to those concerned. Paul was willing to allow the possibility of their being prophets and spiritual men, but made their recognition of his teachings a test of the point. If they recoiled from the test, saying, “We don't know,” he then charged them with ignorance, and called on them to accept their place as ignorant men, and not pretend to be what they were not. The picture before us is that of men in Paul's day professing attainments in the truth, but ventilating doubts as to Paul's authority, under a conceit of superior discernment, which was only a cloak of ignorance. By one trenchant sentence Paul was able to tear the thin gauze from their faces, and reveal the pale, ghastly, green countenances of envious hypocrites, who made a profession of subjection to the truth, but were all the while spiritual cyphers, uncertain about the great realities of the spirit, and only faintly appreciative of even its palpable glories; being chiefly distinguished by a care of their own precious little dignities and reputations, which suffered eclipse from the orb of Paul's vigour and faithfulness.

There is such a thing as the whole counsel of God (Acts 20 : 27); a faithful work of the Lord (Titus 1 : 9-14); an earnest contention for the

faith (Jude 3); a full, wise, uncorrupted, saving testimony of the truth (1 Tim. 4 : 15, 16). And there are those who never get farther than a mere smattering of the thing; whose capacities are too contracted to expand to the greatness of the truth—whose energies are too much bestowed on mere temporalities to leave a sufficiency for growth in the Spirit, and stop short in pious “charitable” uncertainties, which embarrass the operations of the truth, and would spoil the work of God if they were to get their way. They are dealt with in Paul’s words: “If any man think himself a brother, let him show it by acknowledging frankly and abetting heartily the whole counsel of God; but if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.” If he is uncertain in this or that, and disposed to temporize and compromise, let him take his place as an ignorant man, whose voice should not be heard in counsel, and least of all, lifted up against those who are where he professes to be, and who are doing the work, which, by his profession, he ought to be doing with all his heart.

We have not a Paul to cut the matter short in this summary way, though if we had, we should probably have the same fight to fight, considering how they flourished and obtained the ascendancy in Paul’s day. We have, however, the word of God, and good sense to apply its most glorious facts and principles; and with a little timely firmness we may cut our way through the tangle-weed that would obstruct the progress of the boat, and, by the merciful permission of God, land in the desired haven.

It is altogether a mistake to let ignorance or pusillanimity dictate the policy of the truth at any time, but more particularly in an age when the truth has to contend with almost insurmountable difficulties. If any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant; but let not those who are privileged to be otherwise, take direction or example from the ignorant man, nor let their course be influenced by him, either for the sake of pleasing him, or from any other motive. His way leads to destruction and death; and all the more so because he wears the garb and talks the language of one who knows the way of life. “He thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual”: if he be so, let him show it by the manly, earnest, zealous carriage of such a one. But if he be but a spiritual ignoramus, let him take the consequences in being avoided.

This is the lesson of Paul’s harsh words. Nor is it inconsistent with those other words with which, no doubt, the “charitable” man of ignorance would run to the rescue: “We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of them that are weak, and not to please ourselves” (Rom. 15 : 1). It is a well-known popular proverb that “the devil can quote Scripture.” The charitable man of ignorance, quoting these words for such a purpose, is an example of it. Nothing is more grievous to sound sense than to hear cogent words misapplied. How easy it is to do so, while all the while appearing to be arguing most justly. The apparent justness of it is the measure of its mischievousness and aggravation. Thus the hypocritical libertine justifies his flagitious ways by quoting Paul: “All things are lawful unto me.” Thus, too, the Papists extenuate the claims, practices, and pretences of the Roman priesthood, by quoting Leviticus, and the words of Christ to the apostles: “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted.” And thus charitable and mischief-working ignorance would plead for connivance at error and sin by quoting, “We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities

of the weak." The sense of words must always be taken from their connection. Paul was speaking of brethren all alike believing and obedient to the Gospel of their salvation. Some, however, had a weakness in relation to meats and drinks, inherited from the law which had only just ended in Christ. Paul says that strong brethren were not to reject such brethren, or ridicule their weakness, but rather bear with them, and be careful to do and say nothing that would place a stumbling-block in their way. The "strong" and "weak" brethren of the passage were both "*in the faith.*" The "bearing" Paul recommends had no reference to the doctrines and precepts of that faith, but to certain things lying outside of it. He did not mean that brethren faithful to the doctrines and commandments of Christ were to "bear" with those who were loose and uncertain in their allegiance to these. On the contrary, you find in the same epistle, in the very next chapter (16 : 17), that he commands them to "avoid" those who "cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which they had learned." He meant that strong and faithful brethren were to bear with weak faithful brethren in matters not affecting the faith and practice which united them in Christ.

The lesson is serviceable in our own day, in both ways of it. There are matters which do not affect the principles or precepts of the Gospel in which a magnanimous forbearance will be exercised by all right-minded brethren towards those who may not have sufficient vigour of judgment to see their way clearly. On the other hand, there are principles and practices with which there is to be no forbearance whatever. If a man should object to almsgiving, for instance, it would be a violation of Paul's words to say that because "we that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak," therefore, those desiring to be obedient are to give in to this man's scruples, and suppress among themselves obedience to the second great commandment. Suppose he were to find fault with baptism as a needless preliminary to fellowship, as an obstacle keeping back many people ; or suppose he were to complain of the Gospel being preached as essential to salvation ; or suppose he were to find fault with prayer, or to object to praise in the assemblies of the saints—instead of being called on to bear with such, as "weak" brethren, in the sense of giving in to their ignorant whims, the faithful would rather be under an obligation to apply the principle before us in the words : "If any man thinketh himself to be a brother, let him show it by consenting to the wholesome words of the Lord Jesus ; but if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant." And if any man be so ignorant as to stand in the way of the principles or practices of the house of God, which is the pillar and ground of the truth, he brings himself within the stern injunction of John, which commands us to refuse our "God-speed" to any who bring not the doctrine of Christ ; and Paul's command to "reject" a man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition.

Forbearance and faithfulness must never part company. Wisdom teaches when to forbear and when to earn the Lord's commendation of the Ephesian ecclesia : "Thou canst not bear them that are evil." And this wisdom comes from above, through its appointed medium, to those who search diligently for it, as for hid treasure, in the daily reading of the word.

Besides the duty of avoiding those who ought to be avoided, there is another lesson in the 16th chapter of Romans, which comes as a counter-

action to the ideas that some have drawn from Paul's remarks elsewhere on the position of woman in the ecclesia. Paul has said, "Let your women keep silence in the churches : for it is not permitted unto them to speak ; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law." There is a tendency with some to drive this doctrine to an extreme. I have heard some speak contemptuously of the sisters as "mere women, only fit to nurse babies, and look after the pudding." Against such a doctrine every true brother will earnestly protest. It is not only degrading to her whom God has given us for "an helpmeet," but it is inconsistent with the spirit of the Gospel which teaches that there is neither male nor female in Christ : that we are *all one in Christ Jesus*. It is probably the natural extreme of the theory which flourishes on the other side of the water, and is equally to be reprobated in Christ. The one puts woman too high, and the other most certainly too low—so low as only tyrannical and selfish men would put them. Paul's allusions in the chapter referred to, help us to put the right boundary to Paul's doctrine of feminine subjection in the other case. He commends to the attention of the Roman ecclesia one Phœbe, a sister, whom he distinguishes as "a servant of the church at Cenchrea." This implies a prominent, active, if not official position on the part of the sister in question. He further distinguishes her by making her the bearer of the epistle to the Romans, of which, for a time, she was the sole custodian. He entreats the whole Roman ecclesia on her behalf, saying of her that "she hath been a *succourer of many, and of me also*." In the next verse he mentions another sister—Priscilla, as one who had with her husband, for Paul's life laid down her own neck. In verse 6 he sends love to "Mary, who bestowed much labour on him." Further down, he salutes, among others, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Julia, and the sister of Nereus, and the mother of Rufus. This is a standing apostolic recognition of the high place which sisters may fill in the Lord, if, in the grace of God, they have wisdom sufficient. True, there are not many such, but that is a misfortune of our times, and not a necessity of the thing itself. It may account for the cynical views of some, but ought not to be allowed to justify an unnatural, mischievous, and unscriptural theory. Sisters are never likely to develop into noble servants of Christ if the door is shut in their face, by a theory which would consign them to cradles, pots and pans. I do not mean to suggest the cradles and pans are incompatible with higher duties any more than the hammers, shoe lasts, or baking troughs of their rougher brethren, but a doctrine which would tie them all the time to these, is an offence and a mischief. It is the part of true nobility to shine in the performance of the humblest duties, we will not say "stoop" or "condescend," because there is no stooping in the case. These humble duties, which are the most important in the economy of life, become exalted in the hands of intelligence and worth. But to insist on confining sisters to these, would be to ignore the fact that they have brains as well as bodies ; and that men have other needs of help-meetship besides those of knife and fork. Such a boorish doctrine would destroy companionship, where brethren need it most, and unfit their wives to fulfil the highest function of motherhood, which is to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. In fact, it is a doctrine to be opposed and detested as much as any hurtful doctrine may be. The man who holds, and much more the man who

SEASONS OF COMFORT

preaches it, deserves to be deprived of every social advantage, and to be shut up in a cave. This, in fact, is his destiny at last.

Jesus marks the position of woman in a very distinct manner, and on more than one occasion. He rebuked Martha for her zeal in the very department where our ogre friends think women ought exclusively to shine. He commended Mary for her preference for spiritual things and spiritual society. To "the women" he first appeared after his resurrection, and sent his first message to the disciples through them. Shortly before he suffered, one showed the exuberance of her affection by anointing him with expensive ointment. A certain brother standing by (John 12 : 4), who probably thought women were "only fit to look after babies and puddings," said : "Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?" It was a hypocritical plea, for the speaker, who "bare the bag," was a thief, and sold his Master for thirty pieces of silver. Hypocrites always oppose the deeds of righteousness under pious pretences. How did Jesus receive his very proper, very prudent, very judicious protest against such useless "extravagance"? He said, "Let her alone : why trouble ye the woman? she hath wrought a good work upon me. . . . Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this that this woman hath done be told for a memorial of her" (John 12 : 5 ; Matt. 26 : 13). And wheresoever during the past eighteen centuries these apostolic records have been read, this incident has been made mention of to the credit of a woman—a sister—a beloved Mary, who very likely put all her spare money into the act.

If a sister is an intelligent, active, useful, noble servant of Christ, her being a woman is no disqualification or barrier ; it only precludes her from the act of public speaking, and involves subjection to her husband. It does not shut her up to babies, pots, and pans, though these will dutifully receive the right share of attention at her hands. She is a partner, a helper, a fellow-heir in all things pertaining to Christ, and the man who would degrade her from this position is not fit for a place in the body of Christ.

But of course, there are trying women, women of no sense, or perhaps a little sense with a clattering tongue—just sense enough to comprehend the trifles—smart in a small way, with large relish and capacity for the small things of life. They may even talk about "the truth" in the glib fashion in which they talk about Mrs. Jones. Such women are not sisters, though they may bear the name. Such women may covet the respect shown to real sisters ; they cannot get it. They may envy the appreciation and love exhibited towards true Marys, but they can no more get what they wish than a farmer can reap harvest who does not sow in spring. They may steal a little by surprise, but stolen goods have to be given up with bitterness. Insipid, petty, gossiping, garrulous, spiteful women are amongst the most grievous nuisances of creation. The great superabundance of them has probably led to cynical extremes against their sex ; but it does not exclude the fact that there are noble daughters of the Lord God Almighty, nor does it justify the refusal of the right position to such when happily they make their appearance.

For both men and women, there is a place in the kingdom of God. Though they neither marry nor are given in marriage, we may depend upon it that God, who never makes mistakes, has a place in the higher state

for the companionship arising out of the natural and radical differences between man and woman as constituted in this preliminary state. This is one of the sweet secrets we wait to see disclosed. Meanwhile, they stand related to the same rules of admission. Each must be faithful to Christ in their several spheres. The man must be enlightened, believing, courageous, trustful, prayerful, and obedient ; and the woman must be no less in her more contracted circle, aiming particularly at those active, repeated, and untiring good works in the Lord which obtained for sisters of old the approbation of the Lord and the praise of his apostles. Thus may both earn for themselves a good degree which will shine forth with glorious lustre in the blessed ages that are to succeed the present evil world.

Sober Reflection

Mustered in the presence of Christ for judgment.—The rule of judgment.—Self-examination beforehand.—The right sort of reformation.—Orthodox penitence not based in wisdom.—Doleful lamentation no acceptable substitute for obedience.—The example of Israel.—A time to weep notwithstanding.—Useful sorrow.—The study of the holy oracles the true means of enlightenment and sanctification.—The human mind not in itself good.—The Pagan dogma to the contrary effect.—Its destructive effect.—Reading of the Word and prayer.—Making acquaintance with God.—Moses praying for Israel's success a lesson.—The Psalms a storehouse of prayer.—Mostly sorrowful.—The object of evil.—Joy even now.—Rejoicing in God.—Other sorts of joy.—Failure of all causes of joy save one.—God exalted in His own strength.—Gloriousness of God.

WITHDRAWN once again from the immediate concerns of this passing life, we have an opportunity for sober reflection which we do well to turn to account. Soon we shall assemble in another place on an occasion, and for a purpose, that will cause us to think soberly, if we have never done so before, but our sober thinking may not have the same value then. Gathered in the presence of Christ for judgment, our sober thoughts will have no corrective power. There will be no further opportunity of giving effect to wise resolutions. The account will be closed. Things done under the impulse created by the announcement of the Lord's actual arrival will not be reckoned ; for self-evidently, these would not be works of faith, and it is works of faith, or their absence, that will be the ground of acceptance or rejection. The difference between the present occasion and that, is that we can now sit in judgment on ourselves to some purpose. We can examine ourselves in the light of the standard, and see where we are. If we are walking as becometh saints, we can renew our course in thanksgiving ; if we are faltering in the way, we can confess our sins, ask forgiveness, and determine on a more strict subjection to the work in all things, seeking to obey the apostolic exhortation which says : " Be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless " (2 Pet. 3 : 14). Let our determination, however, on this head, take a wise form. Mere sorrow

SEASONS OF COMFORT

for shortcoming, and resolve to do better, will not help us. The religious world abundantly illustrates this vanity. In the more earnest sects the people come together in solemn assembly, and groan while the preacher declaims, or the prayer-sayer pours forth his Baal-like invocations : they groan and cry and feel bad, and go away and continue as they were before. They are not benefited, because their feelings have merely undergone a superstitious agitation ; their understandings have not been appealed to ; they have not been pointed to the Word ; they have not been placed in the way of well-doing : they have merely been put through a sentimental performance. No doubt they go away pacified and satisfied as though they had done an acceptable and a justifying thing. If they were scripturally instructed, they would see differently. Israel was condemned for this very thing, namely, that they lived in disobedience, and then thought to make good their deficiencies by making a doleful lamentation when they came to worship. Thus we read in Malachi, “ And this have ye done again, *covering the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping, and with crying out, insomuch that HE REGARDETH NOT THE OFFERING ANY MORE, or receiveth it with good will at your hand* ” (Mal. 2 : 13). True, there is a time to weep, and there are people to whom it would be a great blessing if their levity and their indifference could be occasionally dissolved in tears of repentance towards God. James addresses such in these words : “ Cleanse your hands, ye sinners ; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep ; let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness ” (4 : 8, 9). At the same time, the mere bemoaning of misdeeds will not ensure the amendment of our course. To rectify a man’s actions you must affect the springs from which they come. Sorrow will be useful to him if it sets him on the right way to do this. There is but one right way. It is indicated in those well-known words of the 119th Psalm : “ Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way ? *By taking heed thereto according to THY WORD.* ” The whole Psalm seems devoted to the purpose of holding up and extolling the Word of God as the means of enlightenment and sanctification. In this it agrees with the sentiment of the Scriptures generally, and with reason and experience. Joshua was commanded : “ Observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee : turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest. This book of the law *shall not depart out of thy mouth ; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein* ” (Josh. 1 : 7). So also it was provided concerning the king of Israel, that “ he shall write him a copy of this law in a book . . . and it shall be with him, and he shall *read therein all the days of his life* : that he may learn to fear the Lord his God ” (Deut. 17 : 18). So also Israel was commanded to write the words of the law on the posts of their houses and their gates : “ And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them *when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up* ” (Deut. 6 : 7). The same thing was enjoined on believers in the apostolic day : “ As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, *that ye may grow thereby* ” (1 Pet. 2 : 2). “ Meditate on these things : give thyself wholly to them ” (1 Tim. 4 : 15). “ I commend you to God, and THE WORD of his grace,

which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified ” (Acts 20 : 32). “ Ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you ” (John 15 : 3). “ The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life ” (John 6 : 63). The words of David, in Psalm 19 : 7, may be emphatically applied to the whole testimony of God, whether delivered before or after his day : “ The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul ; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart ; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever : the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold : sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned : and in keeping of them there is great reward.”

These exhortations and statements are far more deeply founded in truth and wisdom than the majority of people recognize. The pagan view, that the human mind is in itself a celestial, wise, and immortal good thing, has done more than anything to rob this department of the divine testimony of its force. People have failed to see the great excellence of the Scriptures, through the notion that they have in their own minds a fountain of wisdom. They think the Scriptures very good in their way, but not entitled to the encomiums passed upon them in the foregoing language, which they consider strained and extravagant.

When people come to see the truth, they will get rid of this most truly unlearned opinion. Seeing the truth involves a perception of the utter poverty of the human mind by nature, and that the only knowledge that is ultimately valuable is precisely the knowledge communicated in the Scriptures, and which is nowhere else accessible. In proportion as they realize the actual state of the case, they will subscribe fervently to the declarations of David. They will come to see that no language can exaggerate the value and excellence of the Scriptures, but that what Paul says is true : “ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness ; that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” The result of this perception, to consistent people, will be that very daily reading and studying the holy oracles which are commanded. Therefore, brethren and sisters, if in our self-examination on such an occasion as this, we come to the conclusion that we are lacking, let our sorrow be mixed with the resolution to give a more diligent attention to **THE READING OF THE WORD**. This, if patiently persevered in, will lead to the other great corrective of our course ; the other great enlightener and assimilator of our minds to the divine standard—prayer.

There cannot be genuine prayer till there is a genuine faith in God, and genuine faith in God cannot in our day be attained excepting by a continual dwelling in the word. It is in the word we make His acquaintance, both as to what He has done, what He has promised, what He desires in us, and what He is in Himself. These things are not learnt by looking at the sky, the sea, the mountains, or any of the other features of Nature. God had to reveal Himself for us to know Him. He has done it, and we can only get the

knowledge of Him by having recourse to the repository of this knowledge—the word of His truth written aforetime, very voluminously, for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Having recourse to this—“ watching daily at wisdom’s gates, waiting at the posts of her doors ”—we make our acquaintance with God, and are moved to approach Him continually with the ascription of our adoration, the thanksgiving of our gratitude, the confession of our shortcomings, the petition for His help of which we stand in need, in the various matters related to us. This habit will grow, and become an increasing source of strength, comfort and enlightenment. It is a thing we are commanded to do. Jesus taught that “ men ought always to pray ” (Luke 18 : 1). He told his disciples to “ pray always ” (Luke 21 : 36). The apostles are frequent in their exhortations on this point. “ Pray without ceasing ” (1 Thess. 5 : 17). “ Giving thanks always for all things ” (Eph. 5 : 20).

In Moses we have an illustration that has stood forth in all time—a plain, graphic, striking intimation, in picture, so to speak, of the fact that God delights to be requested to move in our behalf, and that our help depends on the continuance of our attitude of *prayer* towards Him. On the hill top, overlooking a battle going on in the valley between Israel and Amalek, he stood with the rod of God in his hand. “ And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed : and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed ” (Exod. 17 : 11). So must we always have our eye towards the upholder of heaven and earth, in everything give thanks, and make our requests known unto God. The disposition so to do will grow with the reading of the word.

The Psalms abound with examples of this pouring out of the soul to God. We cannot do better than bestow a few moments on the Psalm read this morning (21). It strikes a joyful key-note : “ The king shall joy in thy strength, O Lord.” In this it differs from most of the Psalms. The Psalms for the most part are of a sorrowful cast. They give utterance to the oppressed feelings of David and the Son of David during the times of their affliction. But in this case we have a burst of joy. This reminds us that the sorrow is provisional : “ Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” Mourning will not always be the lot of God’s people. Jesus pronounces them “ blessed ” in their mourning, for that “ they shall be comforted.” This “ comfort ” is the end of the matter. “ The redeemed of the Lord shall come to Zion with singing : everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.” This coming time of gladness can only be reached through sorrow. The gladness is prepared for us by the sorrow. Without experience of evil, we should not be fitted for the goodness that is to succeed for those who put their trust in God before the sons of men. The sorrow does not come for its own sake. “ God doth not willingly afflict the children of men.” “ He will not always chide.” We are chastened now, that we may not be condemned with the world. We are expressly made subject to evil, “ that we may become partakers of his holiness ” ; without evil, we should be liable to become heedless and strange towards God. If we remember this in all the burdened days of our pilgrimage, and especially when we are dashed against the sharp pricks of adversity, it will greatly help us to endure and to be profitably exercised. Nay, it will actually give us seasons of joy,

and these seasons will become brighter and more enduring as faith grows stronger.

This joy will be of the complexion of David's and his Lord's. "The king shall joy in *thy strength* ; and in thy salvation how greatly shall he rejoice." This joy in God is what is commanded : " Rejoice in the Lord, O ye righteous." It is what Paul enjoins : " Rejoice in the Lord alway ; again I say, Rejoice." To the man of the world this is unintelligible ; to enlightened experience it is one of the sweetest facts of existence. There are various kinds of joy. Most people's joys are of creature origin. A friend comes to see them from a distance, or they get a better situation, or they are invited to some great man's house, or they succeed in making a great profit, or they get well married, or they get children, or they come to some estate, or they acquire some fame ; some such matter is the fuel by which the flame of their gladness is fed. God is unknown in their experience, and joy in Him a thing impossible. It is the mission of Christ, through the Gospel, to teach men to rejoice in God. And an unfailing source of joy is God when once the mind opens to the great fact of His existence, excellence and power ; for is not He beyond all minor causes of joy ? Those minor causes fail ; He never. He is from everlasting to everlasting. With Him is strength ; not the strength that belongs to man ; man owes his strength to the bread he eats ; and the bread he eats, with man himself, is a perishable thing. Man dieth and wasteth away. But when we turn our eyes to God, we see the full meaning of the words : " Be thou exalted in *thine own strength* : so will we sing and praise thy power." What an admirable idea ! Oh, peerless truth ! Oh, measureless ocean of comfort, in whose healing waters it is life to bathe ! Men appreciate intrinsic excellence in small things. The glittering gold, the sparkling gem, are valued because in themselves enduring and cankerless ; but where are the fine gold and precious stones when we lift our eyes to ETERNAL, UNDECAYING, SELF-CONSISTING STRENGTH, WISDOM, LIFE, LOVE AND POWER ? There is no glory but this ; no good but God. He is the fountain of all the little good we see, and Himself the highest good of all. No wonder that His invitations to eternal fellowship with Him should be qualified with the request that He should be first. No wonder that His advances to us are so planned that no flesh should glory in His presence. No wonder that evil should prevail when sin against His holy name is so rampant in the earth. " Many there be which say, Who will show us any good ? " What is the answer of the instructed ? " Lord, lift upon us the light of thy countenance." The righteous shall be glad in the Lord, and all the upright in heart shall trust in Him. This is their present joy. Vain is every other satisfaction. They fix their eyes on Him, knowing that even during the present night of darkness, during which He hides His face for a moment, He guides them with His hand unseen ; and that in due time, the night will flee away, and His glory shine forth with the brightness of morning, which shall revive their hearts and fill their mouths with song.

Masters and Servants

Apostolic recommendations.—Uncarefulness in temporal matters.—Master and servant.—Truth generates indifference to social position.—The slave free in Christ.—Coming emancipation.—The ennobled sons of suffering.—Resurrection-glory.—The lowest place in the house of greatness.—The durability of earthly glory an untrue story.—The scythe-bearer's visits universal.—The time when the world stops.—The reality of the bubble.—A poor man's service.—The rich man Christ's servant.—Different ways of sowing to the flesh.—Rich and poor the Lord's.—People who think a faithful life "extreme."—Who are they?—Martha and Mary.—The carefulness.—Everything in its own place.—The provisional and eternal.—Widened friendship.

THE sentiments, exhortations, and recommendations of the apostles are as applicable to modern circumstances and as beneficial to those whose ears have been opened to hear them, as to those to whom they were immediately addressed. Our wisdom lies in appropriating them and working them out as the practical rule of our lives. Any other course will be repented with the bitterness of death at last.

But some of these exhortations sometimes seem more applicable than others. Peculiarly suitable to our case are the words of Paul to the Corinthians, in which, in view of the shortness of the time, he recommends uncarefulness with respect to temporal matters. He applies this first to position in life: "Art thou called being a servant (strictly translated a slave)? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman; likewise he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant." This, of course, related to the slavery practised among the Romans, but the principle applies to the social relations of the present day. There is nothing comes home with greater force than anything affecting a man's position in this respect. All other things and considerations are outside of him, so to speak. He can consider and decide them without feeling that he is deciding anything of supreme importance; but when he is called to consider whether he will be servant or master—poor or well-to-do—it is something that comes home. It affects the centre of the circle of his individuality. In the world it is the guiding star and the mainspring. The truth shows its power nowhere more strikingly than when it governs this: when it can make a man indifferent on the subject of his social position. It contains this power, though all men feel it not. Industriously courted and distinctly realized, in the daily reading of the word, and in that communion with the Father, through the Son, in prayer, which it engenders, it is able to induce the uncarefulness prescribed by Paul.

He had evidently been asked how a knowledge of the truth affected a man's relations as master or servant. Must a believer cease to be a master? Or if a slave, must his brethren buy him off? The answer to both questions is, No, not of necessity. If a man called by the Gospel be a slave, let him continue in that position, unless he can command his freedom, and then, of course, he is at liberty to choose it "rather." If he be unable to

deliver himself, he is to "abide" in his position with resignation, not, however, as a matter of iron-handed duty, but in recollection of the fact that though a slave he is Christ's freeman, and, therefore, will obtain his liberty in due time.

There is great power and consolation in this thought, which may be applied to every lowliness that is incident to the believer in this present probation. In Christ we are made free. This is true in a very real sense. We may not at all times realize it; we may be like the Israelites in Egypt, who, for anguish of spirit at their burdens, hearkened not unto Moses, who had come to deliver them; but it is nevertheless a fact that fully justifies the practical application that Paul gives it. A man's being Christ's free man is a great reason why he should patiently endure the humiliation and bondage that belong to this life. Our present probation is only for a season, and that a short one. It will assuredly come to an end. The toil, and the monotony, and the weariness of body and mind, as we grapple with the duties of our position, are each day lessening in their duration. The days hurry by, and hasten us to the freedom that awaits us in Christ; and any day the change may burst upon us like a lightning flash; whether we think of the coming of Christ or of that dissolution in death that awaits us all in the ordinary course. And when it comes, each happy heir of the liberty that belongs to Christ's free men will experience how real a thing it is. First, they will be delivered from the burdens that press immediately on them—burdens as pertaining to the affairs of this life: burden of anxiety, burden of toil, burden of vexation from various causes, burden of family affairs, burden of business, burden of submission to evil and misrepresentation, burden of obligations this way and that in this present evil world. The whole burden will roll off like Christian's pack at the foot of the cross. With tears (perhaps) of joy, Christ's free men, after long waiting and watching, will hail the glorious freedom. But this will be but a beginning. Christ can do, and will at that time do, for them what no doctor can do, and no training or treatment in any number of "institutions" can do for them; he will radically change their poor mortal nature, so that it shall be no longer mortal, or weak, or failing. With a touch or a word, he will transmute their substance into that which shall be incorruptible, undecaying, ever-enduring, powerful, and energetic, so that they shall feel lightsome, clear and joyous for evermore, as light of the morning sun. From before this change of body, every burden of weakness will fly for ever away; strong, glad and grateful, they will stand gloriously in this liberty of Christ, giving praise with the wonderful and unwearied ardour of the spirit-body; and with it, there will come the grace, and the symmetry, and the beauty that always come with strength, wisdom, and joy; so that each will be able to say to his fellow, "I never saw you look so well: blessed be God." And then to each accepted servant, he will introduce a large assembly of similarly ennobled sons of suffering. There will be many to rejoice together and sing praise to the Lamb. Resurrection-glory in solitude would be a joy, but how much more glorious when thousands of Jehovah's righteous will share it together. And then comes the interesting work of allotting to each one in the company a place in the mighty framework of the Messiah's universal dominion. How high will be the lowest place in that house of greatness! for the lowest place means

immortality, and honour, and blessedness. Truly "he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than John the Baptist" was. In his allotted place of dominion, each saint will be the loved and honoured representative of the government of the Highest enthroned at Jerusalem. He will be the highest dignitary, the richest land-owner, the happiest man, the most beautiful person among his people; exalted above the fear of death; his place and his pleasure to bless those entrusted to his care, to lead, and guide, and rule them in the name and for the glory of God, and the rejoicing of men, and the gladness of the assisting angels.—He will be CHRIST'S FREE MAN.

Let a believer of the truth realize this, and he will be enabled to stoop easily to present servitude. It is but a short time at the longest. Let him remember, on the other hand, that other truth expressed by Paul, that "the fashion of this world passeth away": that is, all things and ways to which we stand related in this present time are transient: ephemeral essentially. This is a twin lesson of true wisdom with that we have been considering. It is equally difficult to learn. The things around us make the impression on the imagination that they are enduring: that the things of God are maybes; possible phantoms—not more than probabilities, scarcely that—while the affairs about us are the bird in hand—real, valuable and abiding. Few would own to the thought in this naked form, and yet this is the story that all things tend to whisper in the ear of a natural man. That it is an untrue story requires but a moment's thought to see. At any given moment, things seem stable enough; but let there be time enough for taking observations, and the truth appears. All things are on the move, and the "move" is steadily towards the grave.

You see it best, perhaps, after an absence from a place for ten or twenty years. You enquire for this one and that, and they are gone! Strangers are in their places. "Dear me; what changes!" Each year brings new stones to the cemetery. The grim scythe-bearer goes quietly round, and takes first one and then another. He misses nobody. He may be a long time in calling at a particular house, but give him time, he will be there at last as sure as there is a living man in it. Everyone knows this and sees it, yet they fail to take in the full force of the lesson. Probably, because, although they see friend after friend carried to the grave, they see the world go on as well, and take a little comfort, as if the world said, "All right, it is only your friend that is gone; I am still here; keep comfortable." It is when it comes to a man's own flesh that he feels the full force of the lesson. The situation looks wonderfully different when it is himself that the King of Terrors looks in the face. The world goes on after other people die, but when it comes to a man's own turn, the world stops. There is no more business for him; no more friends for him; no more meetings for him. The whole scene suddenly cuts short, the world passeth away, never, never to return. Only one thing remains, and that comes quickly, immediately, as soon as the breath is out of his body, as it seems. Christ remains for him—a dread meeting for weal or woe. In this sense, Christ is very near to every one of us, though he were ten thousand years away in time. In this sense, all things to us are so transient and fragile, that they may in a moment twinkle out like a bubble.

Therefore, if a man is a servant (and cannot be otherwise), let him care not for it. It is but for a short time, and then freedom will come in a form that no one could attain by the highest effort and the highest success in this world. If he can be other than a servant, let him accept the liberty as an opportunity for greater good ; but this will need discretion. A man in striving to liberate himself from one set of difficulties, may lead himself into others great enough to kill him, in a spiritual sense. I have known cases where men have aimed high in business, under the plea of acquiring more power to serve the truth, and, in the process of acquiring the power, their hearts have been overcome by the fascination of wealth, and the original intentions clean forgotten. Contentment with moderate things is well. "The little that a righteous man hath is more than the riches of many wicked." It is better to serve God with what you have, than to put Him off to a larger opportunity that may never come, and if it comes, may destroy you. The Master can be served in a hundred ways by a poor man. The poor man's little may be of a higher amount in the Master's estimation than the rich man's gold. See the case of the widow's mite. Nevertheless, "if thou mayest be free, use it rather."

The other side of the picture is this : "He that is called being free, is Christ's servant." No rich man professing the truth is rich for himself. He may act as if he was ; but he will find his mistake at last. He is Christ's *slave*, for this is the word used by Paul. To put it in another apostolic way, he is Christ's steward : what he has belongs to Christ, and although the use of it is at his absolute discretion, no man having the least right to dictate, he will be called to account for the use he has made of the Lord's property. Does he use it for his own gratification and honour, or for the doing of the Lord's commands ? The verdict of the day of Christ will be according to that fact ; and in that day there will be no respect of persons. Every man shall reap as he sows. Some men sow to the flesh in pot-houses and among lewd fellows. Some sow to the flesh in gilded parlours, and conservatories, and croquet grounds in polite society. The judgment will place them both in the same rank at last. Some men sow to the Spirit in shabby clothes, mean houses and meagre half-pence ; and a few do the same work among the fine furniture and lawns, and five-pound notes. Both will reap life everlasting. The lesson for the saint, be he high or low, is that conveyed by Paul in the words, "None of us liveth to himself; and no man (in Christ) dieth to himself ; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord. Whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's" (Rom. 14 : 8). It is wise to take this fact home now, and let it have full effect in our lives. A life based upon it is considered "extreme" and fanatical ; but who considers it so ? Not the Lord's people, and certainly not the Lord, for he commended Mary over Martha, in having chosen the good part that should not be taken away ; and he has said that no man can be his disciple who does not discern him sufficiently to prefer him above every folly and every interest in this life. Why should we defer to the opinion of those who, with all their refinements, are not the Lord's friends ? They are not of the world ; and can we expect the world to approve of consecration to God ? The world called the Lord mad for his devotion in this direction, and "if they call the master of the house Beelzebub," what can the servants expect ? It is sufficient for the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

disciple that he be as his Master. The Master was disowned and discarded as an impractical dreamer—a fiery enthusiast—an extreme preacher. Let us not aim to be otherwise estimated by the corresponding class in our own day. But approve or not approve, commend or condemn—esteem or scorn, as the world or worldly friends and professors, may, THE DAY will reveal that the Lord is our proprietor, that we are not our own, and that all the matters are in our hands on trust, of which an account will be called for, and will have to be given in very open court, to our shame or honour, according as we are foolish or wise in our present procedure, in the several spheres, high or low, in which we may be called.

There is, therefore, every reason for Paul's remark : " I would have you without carefulness," that is, carefulness in the sense of worldly anxiety. Peter tells us to " cast all our care upon God, for he careth for us." Faith will confide and good sense will abandon useless fret. We have the authority of Jesus for saying that " the Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him " : and that the benevolence spontaneously exercised towards the birds of the air and the grass of the field will not be invoked in vain by those who fear Him.

Marriage, comfort, worldly possessions, are all very well in their place : that place is at the footstool of the truth. " But this I say, brethren, that the time is short : it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none ; and they that weep, as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world, as not abusing it." This is Paul's indication of a wise attitude in his day. If appropriate in his day, how much more for us who are on the very verge of the advent ? We have a double contingency hanging over everything we do. The disciples in Paul's day had death : we have that and the Lord's re-appearance. Either of these will terminate in a moment and for ever our connection with present things. How lightly then should we hold them, and how high a place should we give to the things of the Lord ! It may trouble some to think of husbands and wives " as though they had them not," but the trouble will give way before enlightened apprehension. Wives and husbands in the Lord will not be separated though their relation will be changed. They will be mutually dearer than ever, only a thousand others will be just as dear. The circle of select friendship will be widened out to take in a great many. These being approved of the Lord and glorified will be as true and beloved as the dearest friend we ever clasped to our bosom. We can, therefore, take in Paul's thought easily, and treasure it too, that the present time, being a short time, and a provisional time, it is wise and needful that we hold loosely all its relations and institutions, in prospect of the day when, the Perfect Being having come, that which is in part will be done away—swallowed up in the " exceeding and eternal weight of glory " that shall be revealed for all such as hunger and thirst after righteousness, and walk in the narrow way that leadeth unto life.

Remembrance

Contracted views of the present.—The right view.—Part of a mighty programme.—Walking worthy of it.—Those who do, and those who do not.—The chosen and the rejected.—The principle on which they are so.—Touching the root of the matter.—Remembrance.—The things to be remembered.—High and mighty matters branching in all directions.—Negligence of the table and the word.—Evil consequences.—The brain as a book of blank pages.—The different things written therein, and how.—The table a potent agent of spiritual good.—Keeping in memory.—The danger of failing to do so.—Things easy to remember, and things difficult.—The necessity for effort.—The successful result, even now, of surpassing interest.—Self-controlled and isolated, though not indifferent, spectators of the beautiful perishing world.—Successful business.—Honourable politics.—The comment of a saint on the whole picture.—The established clergy.—The saints' speech to them.—True consolation yet purchased by submission to the Cross.

A too constant and exclusive dwelling in the circumstances of our present life is certain to disqualify us for viewing it properly and using it rightly in relation to the objects for which we have been separated for Christ by the Gospel. The time and the state we live in are but part of a mighty programme which reaches backwards and forwards in long distances. And if we are not familiar with this programme, we cannot rightly estimate the relation of our individual parts to it, and are, therefore, liable to live after a wrong plan. Of course, the remark applies only to those who have professedly made Christ their portion. As regards others, their lives are lives of vanity, beginning and ending in darkness. From the cradle to the grave, they are *without God and have no hope* (Eph. 2 : 12), and cannot be expected to be influenced by any consideration outside the circle of mortal requirements and experiences. But as to those who are Christ's, they neither live for themselves nor die unto themselves. They are separated for a great purpose and a mighty plan, reaching back to historic ages, up to the throne of the Almighty Power, and forward to the *aion* of blessedness in Abraham. This is the spirit or genius of their calling. But are they equal to it? Do they rise to it? Are they walking worthy of it? Do their minds, and purposes, and principles expand to the height, and breadth, and depth of the calling of God in Christ Jesus?

The upshot will show that in some cases it is so, and in many cases not so : which, of course, will mean that all who are called to this calling will not be chosen. Now about this matter there is no mystery, as to the principle by which the choice will be regulated, or its relation to our own present control. There is no more exact relation between seedtime and harvest than there is between the result to a saint of the course pursued in this present time, as regards those attainments which will determine his standing before the Lord at his coming. Cause and effect are the universal rule of divine procedure, no more in the operations of Nature than in the causing every man to find according to his ways. There will be nothing arbitrary or capricious in the acceptance of some who profess Christ and

SEASONS OF COMFORT

the rejection of others. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Now in the particular matter in question, the appointment of this weekly celebration of the sufferings of Christ touches the root of it. What is the object of this breaking of bread? To *bring to remembrance*. To bring to remembrance what? The things involved in the symbols. What are these? The answer to this opens out, you see, on all sides, like the spokes of a wheel from the hub. "The sufferings of Christ and the glory to be revealed" are a compendious summary of really most high and mighty matters, which branch out in all directions, and to which the mind requires to be continuously applied to obtain that due degree of familiarity required. In this respect, the result will be in accordance with a man's degree of diligence. If he give but a scant attention, he will have but a small acquaintance and a weak faith. How can it be otherwise? How can a man become acquainted with God, and in actual, practical, earnest love with Christ, and at home with all the divine purposes and ways, who comes but occasionally to the breaking of bread, who reads the scriptures in a haphazard sort of way, or perhaps not at all, while he is all the while very diligent in his attention to all business concerns and domestic matters? As God has constituted things, it is impossible. The brain takes all its impressions from without, and it can only receive so much—each day a little. It may be compared to a book of blank pages, on which each day writes something on each page. The character of the writing depends upon the holder of the pen. If a man's whole strength is each day spent, from sunrise to the evening shade, in attending to mortal matters, the natural man holds the pen all the time, and a natural man's record is the result. The brain is filled with images of natural perishing life, which profit nothing for the time to come. But let God have the pen some part of the day; let the word be diligently read, let the soul ascend frequently to God in prayer, let the thoughts rest sometimes on the promises, let the business of God have some share of the day's counsel and strength, something then is written for God; and this process continued from day to day will fill up a good account. The mind will be in-lettered with the ideas of God. It will be assimilated to the affairs of God, and the man brought into a state of increasing ripeness for the calling to which we are called by the Gospel.

The breaking of bread is but a central point in this spiritual activity. We shall use it unwisely if we are content with the formality of attending to it. Its object is to keep us alive to every good word and work. The table is a radiating point for those influences that help us to overcome in the battle between the natural and spiritual. Chief among those influences is that "memory" which stands so prominently forward in the original institution. The Gospel is only saving to us "if we keep in memory" what is delivered therein (1 Cor. 15:3). This phrase "keep in memory" points to the principal difficulty and the principal danger which we have to encounter in the race set before us in the Gospel. The things of the natural man require no effort of memory. They are present; they are before our eyes; they appeal to powerful instincts that spontaneously work in our bosoms. Home, friends, family, comfort, property, honour, and the other things that go to make up the circle of the present life, require no memory and no effort at attention. They are with us and in us, and sweet to us as

natural men. But the things of Christ are out of the sight of the natural man : they are past and future. We learn of them from the word apostolically delivered eighteen centuries ago, and, prophetically, before then. We know them not otherwise. Consequently it requires an effort to keep them in memory, the more particularly because of the clamour for attention the other things are constantly making. We do not learn of God's matters in the clouds. There is nothing in the sky, or sea, or landscape, or town, or business, or home, or body, or blood, to tell us of them : quite the contrary. We know of them only through the word preached and read : and as faith cometh by hearing, so faith continueth by the same instrumentality. Consequently, before the things of Christ can become a power in our minds at all able to compete with the things of the natural man, they must be diligently and constantly renewed by special culture, in reading the Word of God, and prayer, and meeting, and the various other ways in which the memory may be refreshed and the knowledge strengthened and increased. This is the more true, because the things of Christ, in many points, are distasteful to the natural man.

When we achieve the victory, in a constant application to the Word of Christ, our position is one of surpassing interest, even if of present pain. We realize where we are, what we are about, and what great things are ahead, by the power of which we can reconcile ourselves patiently to present disadvantages, and rightly look on the scene which is passing around us.

We stand on an elevation, so to speak, looking down on the busy world around. We see the crowd of fashion, resplendent in the varied beauties that wealth has generously lavished, cultured in all the superior mannerisms and intelligences of the natural man, and mutually attentive and loving. It is a pretty picture, albeit we know it is mostly hollow ; but the truth enables us to say, " We can afford to endure this picture. We are not of these people. We cannot be of them, because their gayness and their comforts are not touched with God." We may feel that we should like to share their amenities, the sociabilities, their pleasant company, their good graces ; but it is not possible. There is a gulf between us. It is a pity ; we feel it ; we are sensible of the deprivation to which the truth subjects us in the isolation it imposes, but we know it is only for a season. This is the day of Sin's sons and daughters. The day of God is at hand, and, with it, such company will be brought to light as will make Fashion's ranks appear meagre and poor. This company is ours, if we are content, like the Head of it, to be, while in the world, not of it.

Then we look on the successful men of business. We behold the spectacle of their prosperity, whether in the full tide of well-managed thriving concerns, netting handsome profits put into the concern or laid securely by in investment ; or the affluence of opulent retirement, adding yet house to house, and yet piling the increasing gold. The truth helps us to say, " Ye have laid up treasure for yourselves, and in a fashion ye are enjoying yourselves, but your life is ignoble ; and noble or ignoble, there is a canker in it all ; ye cannot keep what ye have ; ye must depart ; ye must flee as a shadow ; and the plenty ye have scraped industriously together, and skilfully fenced from harm, will do nothing for you with Him who has the key of the future, and who will kill or save alive on His own principles only, which are not commercial principles."

SEASONS OF COMFORT

On the busy political world, where high honour is reaped and rich prizes secured in the arena of intellectual prowess, we can calmly look with the recollection that it is destined shortly to pass away with a great noise, and the elements thereof to melt with fervent heat ; and that the only enduring politics are those of Jesus of Nazareth, who, in his day, submitted to be a stranger and a pilgrim, but who, at his return in power and great glory, will look round for his faithful stewards to share with them the honour of universal empire, to be enjoyed in the unspeakable luxury of an incorruptible body. We can say to the whole throng of bustling aspirants and successful competitors, and established possessors, who, with great airs of self-consequence, divide among themselves the honours and fat things of the present *kosmos*, " We can wait. You have clutched a shadow. Your world passeth away ; the kingdom of God which will be here in due season endureth for ever. He gives it to childlike believers in His Word. Ye cast His Word behind you. Woe unto you that are full now ; for ye have received your consolation."

Or we turn and look into the swarming ranks of the Church. Bishops and parsons, sleek and well-favoured, educated to the highest pitch of culture, honoured of all men, secured in their temporalities by the most solid of human guarantees—what an exercise of patience to behold their pride, and their power, and their affluence, and their respectability ! But even to these, the truth enables us to be calm, and in patience to possess our souls. To these it enables us to say, " Your position is desirable in some respects, but we are glad we share it not. A little like the cry of sour grapes, perhaps, but none the less a sober saying ; for ye belong to a system accursed of God, and destined to vanish before the whirlwind of His anger in this culminating latter day. Ye are full now, and laugh now, and are spoken well of now, but it is your destiny to be emptied of your greatness, and filled with weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

These consolations are very real where faith is strong enough, through the reading of the word and prayer, to lay hold of them. But, of course, our right to appropriate them depends upon our acceptance of the position of Christ in all other respects. In this evil time, this means the acceptance of the pilgrim's disagreeable part, and the obedience of commandments which are disagreeable to the natural man. If we merely have knowledge of Christ without obedience, we shall find when the time comes that the consolation of Christ does not belong to us. It is well, therefore, to try ourselves in the moments of our anticipations. It is well to ask ourselves the question, if we occupy the position entitling us to rejoice in hope of the coming glory. The position is plain ; it is not attractive to the flesh ; it involves self-denial as to worldly ways and honours. There is, therefore, a temptation to avoid it, or modify it to an extent, interfering with our acceptance. The consolation of Christ is for those who accept the sufferings of Christ ; and every man will have his part of this suffering, even in this free country, who courageously and openly acts the part of a true disciple in obeying the commandments and taking part in the affairs of Christ, as existing at the present time in his truth and his brethren. The rewards of Christ are only for the faithful stewards ; and faithful stewardship means the use of ourselves and our substance as the property of Christ and not as our own—a policy of life which interferes with all the ordinary aims and

pursuits of men, but which brings with it a great present advantage of peace and joy, secures an inheritance which the wealth of the world could not purchase, on which no rules of human valuation can put a price, and with which no human glory can compare.

Nearer the Crisis

The end foreshown in Nebuchadnezzar's vision.—The days of the clay and iron feet.—The fulfilment of the vision during past ages without human assistance.—Our non-existence during the progress of the vision.—Yet our turn at last.—The importance of our part.—The Lord's arrival.—The standard of our position then.—The kingdom of heaven.—The principles of the kingdom in the saints beforehand.—The wisdom of the present world manifested as folly when the kingdom of God arrives.—The right course to pursue now.—The principles of the kingdom of heaven.—Individual sense of insignificance.—The fear of the Lord.—Broken and contrite in heart.—The case of Job.—Human doctrines in the contrary direction.—The undivine nature of present society.—The man after God's own heart.—His example on the subject of prayer.—Love and fear nourish prayer.—Christ's brethren men of prayer.—Self-examination.—Shortcomings and forgiveness.—Christ's compassion on the people.—Our example.—Mercy an attribute of God and all His children.—Saying and doing.—Loving in deed and in truth.—Present dangers.—The thing to aim at.

EVERY breaking of bread brings us one week nearer to the great crisis so vividly brought before us in the vision of Nebuchadnezzar's image, which we have had under our attention during the last week, in our daily readings. It is about 2,500 years since Daniel said to Nebuchadnezzar, "Thou art this head of gold." The things that were at that time matters of prophecy are now nearly all in the past. The golden empire of Babylon ; the silver empire of the Medes and Persians ; the brazen dominion of the Greeks, and the two-legged iron power of imperial Rome are all affairs of history. We stand in the days of the clay and iron feet—the day when the Europe-ruling, ancient, iron Rome is a divided and weakened mass of independent sovereignties ; and we are living late—very late, in these days—at the end of them, in fact, as we know from other visions and many contemporary facts, such as the complete disappearance of the coercive power of the Papacy. We stand on the verge of the catastrophe represented by the destruction of the symbolic image. We live in the era of the Lord's appearing to destroy all the kingdoms of men, and set up that one universal dominion of which there will be no end.

It is profitable to realize one fact. During all these centuries, the vision of Daniel has been slowly and surely working itself out in the affairs of men, without our assistance—yea, without our existence. When Daniel stood before Nebuchadnezzar you might have searched the measureless universe round and you would not have anywhere found the persons who

SEASONS OF COMFORT

are assembled here this morning. Five hundred years afterwards you might have renewed the search with no greater success. A thousand years—two thousand years afterwards, we were still unborn ; yet the hand of God was slowly writing on the page of history the record of His purpose accomplished. Does this not enable us to feel how unnecessary we are to God : how certainly His word will come to pass independently of us ? Yet we must not shut our eyes to the importance of our own relation to the matter. Our turn has come at last : here we find ourselves at the most interesting period of the entire vision ; called in the grace of God to be hearers of the joyful sound, with a view to our being “doers of the word” and heirs of the glorious kingdom about to appear. In this position, it is of the first consequence that we seek to gauge our prospective relations.

When the moment arrives at which it will become clear that the great culmination of the vision has begun—when it is announced that the Lord is actually in the earth, the anxiety that will press itself home with overwhelming force on every mind will be, “What is my individual relation to the crisis ?” “Am I favourably connected with the great matters about to be transacted ?” It will be evident by a moment’s thought that mere intelligence in the signs of the times will not be of great value in the dreadful situation. The signs of the times are valuable only as indications of the approach of something. It is the something whose approach they indicate that is the standard of our position amid the closing scenes of the Gentile times. What is that something ?

Brethren and sisters, it is a kingdom *of heaven* that is coming ; a kingdom founded upon the principles of God in contrast with those now recognized among men ; a kingdom not of this world. Who will be admitted to it ? Only those who belong to it in the sense of partaking of its principles, and being prepared by the present individual operation of these principles for the political enforcement of them, which is to characterize the operation of the kingdom of God. This fact is made abundantly evident in the New Testament. Jesus speaks of many who will come to him in that day, seeking admission, to whom he will say, “I never knew you.” The reason of their rejection he discloses in the words, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that *doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.*” Hence the great question of the hour, when the Lord has come, will be, “Have I acted in harmony with the principles on which the kingdom of heaven is to be set up ?” The Lord will have no use for us, unless our wisdom be according to his standard. Many men are wise according to this world, whose wisdom will turn into great folly under the scrutiny of the Lord. Kings and captains ; bishops and great men ; professional men and merchants grown rich, with their much honouring of each other, and their much provision for their own well-being, and their neglect of the poor, and their despising of the Word of God, will appear in the dread and confusion of that day as the greatest of fools ; and so will all professors who have caught up and acted out their worldly-wise principles. The only men who will appear wise will be those who have made themselves fools and poor for Christ’s sake, who have incurred reproach and poverty in the carrying out of the work he has given his servants to do in his absence, in the sounding abroad of his name, and the comforting of his brethren, and the succouring of his poor.

In view of that time to which we shall all presently stand related, whether we live or die, let us glance at the principles of the kingdom of heaven as brought before us in the portions of Scripture read this morning. The kingdom is not of this world. Christ said, "I am not of this world": the application of which is brought home to us in the words of Paul: "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." Let us look at the principles which distinguish the accepted of God from the present evil world in all its departments.

First, turn to the reading from Job. There we find Job saying, "I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Here we have one of the first principles of the kingdom of heaven. Remember who Job was. God said of him, "There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil." Yet he says, "I abhor myself in dust and ashes." He had just had a glimpse of the divine majesty, and as in the similar case of Daniel (10 : 8), all his beauty in him turned to corruption. He was overpowered by the sense of the inferiority and uncleanness of human nature created within him by his vision of the glory of the divine nature. Now, though we are not permitted to see this glory with the eye, we have so much recorded pertaining to it, that with due attention to what is written, we may easily attain the same profound sense of worthlessness and insignificance. We must attain to this if we are to enter the kingdom of God. It is one of the first things exacted of such. "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity . . . to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word." It is written, "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*". The fear of the Lord produces a strong sense of self-abasement where it is effectual. It is a logical result; for where a man adequately apprehends the greatness and majesty of God as the SELF-EXISTENT and the Creator of all, he will easily realize how little he is in himself, and how inferior as a piece of earthly defiled animal mechanism. The mind that is equal to the grasping of the glory of God will readily feel the dishonour of man. This sentiment is the first characteristic of the family of God. It is enunciated with emphasis in every part of the Scriptures. Jesus declares that except a man *humble himself as a little child*, he shall in no case enter into the kingdom of God. Peter and James both quote Solomon's declaration that "the Lord resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble." It is written many times, that He knoweth the proud afar off; that those who walk in pride, He will abase; that he that exalteth himself shall be brought down; that the meek and the lowly, and the modest, and the child-like, and the humble He will receive, approve, bless, honour, and exalt.

This is, in fact, the distinguishing feature of the principles revealed from heaven, as contrasted with those that originate in the thinking of man. This is seen and felt by those who intelligently advocate the latter. There is a good illustration of it in a recent magazine article, in which the teaching of Christ is opposed explicitly on this point. The writer argues that self-reliance is the root of all nobility and virtue, and that because Christianity inculcates self-abasement, it is an ignoble and demoralizing religion. The writer is a believer in human immortality and innate human excellence. This explains his insane opposition to the most true and (in the true sense) philosophical religion of Christ. Any man with a practical knowledge of

SEASONS OF COMFORT

human nature, unobscured by the false sentiments generated by false philosophy, will be prepared heartily to endorse the declaration of the New Testament, that in the flesh dwelleth no good thing ; and to admire the foundation principle of the Gospel system—the glory of the Creator, and the humiliation of poor man.

Suffice it on the present occasion to realize that at the approaching reappearance of Christ, no man need go before him with the expectation of his approbation who is not supremely characterized by this first principle of the house of God—personal smallness in his own esteem, and a “ minding not high things, but condescending to men of low estate ” (Rom. 12 : 16). It need not be said how totally different is the state of things prevailing in society around us. Our danger is great from this circumstance. We are apt to catch the spirit of the world in all the haughtiness and mightiness of carriage that is to be seen everywhere, and to be ashamed of the soberness and smallness and rationality that belong to the profession of the truth. Let us beware. The truth calls us to “ live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.” Any other life will make our destruction certain, when we come to stand before that Judge, who is no respecter of persons.

The second reading brings before us the next family characteristic of the sons and daughters of God. “ Unto thee will I cry, O Lord, my rock ; be not silent to me.” David, the man *after God's own heart*, was a man of prayer : so was David's Son and Lord, who frequently retired from the crowd that thronged around him, and in some cases “ continued all night in prayer to God ” (Luke 6 : 12). It is a standing precept of his house “ to pray to God without ceasing,” whose house are we if we continue steadfast in the faith of obedience of Him. And it is natural for sons of God to pray, for as sons of God, their first love is the love of God—not a feeble, moderate love, but a love of the sort expressed by the words, “ with all thy strength, soul, and mind.” This being their love, it impels them, as all love does, to intercourse with its object. Their fears impel them in the same direction : for they have fears, as David had, and Jesus in the days of his flesh had. The triumphs of the enemy and their own experience of evil, and the awful greatness of God, make them afraid, and drive them to prayer. This mixture of love and fear gives earnestness to their prayers, and hope makes the light to shine. The men that Jesus will summon around him in the work of God will be men of prayer—not praying men in the mechanical sense, like Mohammedans and Papists, but men in whom ripe reason, acting on the facts revealed in the Word of God, has brought forth its fruits of daily and hourly incense to the Most High. None else need hope for acceptance. This is the fact to be looked at and applied now.

Let everyone fall back on self-examination. If we come short in this matter, let us not give way to dejection and hopelessness. Let us rather take courage from the other fact exemplified in both the Scriptures read, and indeed in all the Scriptures continually—that “ there is forgiveness with God.” “ He that confesseth his sins and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” To neglect prayer is a sin, because it is a transgression of the law which commands us to pray. If any man convicts himself secretly of this neglect, let him put an end to his neglect, let him forsake his sin ; let him “ pray always, and not faint,” as Jesus taught at his first appearing. In everything giving thanks, for this, says Paul, is the will of God concerning us.

In the third portion read, we have another point illustrated. Jesus is brought before us in the attitude of "having compassion on the people," and ministering to their need, and in this, as in everything else, we have to remember that it is written, "He hath left us an example that we should follow his steps." Mercy is one of the greatest attributes of the Almighty. "Merciful" was the reported characteristic of the kings of Israel (1 Kings 20 : 31) ; it is the quality of the kings of the future age. Without mercy a man is without hope, whatever his intellectual attainments : "He shall have judgment without mercy that hath showed no mercy" (Jas. 2 : 13). On the other hand, the accepted of the future age are described as "the merciful." "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5 : 7). "With the merciful thou, O Jehovah, wilt show thyself merciful" (Psa. 18 : 25). Kindness, forbearance, magnanimity, patience, are characteristics that belong to the house of God, and must be cultivated by those who hope to be accepted by the Lord of mercy in the coming day of his glory. In the day of his humiliation, he showed these qualities in the highest degree, and we are poor disciples if we cannot show our discipleship in our compassionateness as well as in our knowledge. The Lord's example is also useful in exhibiting compassion in practical manifestation. It is easy to say, "Poor thing!" What you will *do*? That is the question. The Lord not only had compassion on the multitude, but he made them sit down, and supplied them with food. Are we his disciples if we say, "Be ye warmed and filled," but give not those things that are needful? It may be said, "We have not so much in our power as he had." True, but we shall be held responsible for what *is* in our power. We are only *stewards* of the manifold grace of God, and the day will come, though it linger, when we shall have to give an account thereof. The criticisms or commendations of our brethren we may escape or be misled by, but the judgment-seat is at the end of the journey, where there is no escape.

These are some of the principles upon which the approaching kingdom of God will be founded. Now is the time to be leavened with them in the diligent attendance thereon in the reading of the Word of God and prayer. Let us take care that we waste not the time in barren disputation, in which the old man and not the Lord Jesus is served. Let us take care, lest after much profession and preaching and contention, the Lord Jesus stand suddenly on the earth in this latter day to say to us, "I know you not. Ye have called me, Lord, Lord ; but ye have not addicted yourselves to the obedience of my commandments. I have no use for you in a kingdom to be conducted on principles to which ye have proved yourselves reprobate. Depart from me, ye cursed." Let us rather be of those who, serving him in deed and in truth, under however much odium, will be addressed in the cheering words, "Ye have been faithful in a very little ; enter ye into the joy of your Lord."

The Only Hope

The beautiful anticipations of the natural man in vain.—Revels of the imagination.—In the state of nature, no hope, no comfort.—Aliens from God.—The great works of God not the property of sinners.—Our unutterable orphanage in Adam.—The joyful significance of the Lord's table.—Called to be sons of God and heirs.—The Father comes nigh in Christ.—Unmeasured blessedness.—Dim eyes.—Believing in Christ and waiting for his appearing.—Our former darkness.—The glorious light.—Yet mourning as strangers and pilgrims.—Sight all against us.—Faith still has strong foundations.—What they are.—Watching for the daybreak.—The age of woe.—Need for patience.—Comfort in the dark.—Yet agonizing for the day of righteousness.—Yearning even unto death for the glory to be revealed.—Pining in the wilderness.—Longing for God.—Waiting for the Lord.

ASSEMBLED at this appointed weekly memorial of the breaking of bread, we are met around the only source of true comfort there is for the perishing sons of men. There is no other hope than Christ. Men may indulge in beautiful anticipations apart from him. They may paint to themselves bright visions of glory to come, lovely pictures of "cloudless summerlands," celestial worlds of progress, joy, friendship, perfection, in accordance with what may be their conceptions of what is desirable. But, apart from God's purpose in Christ, these are but the revels of the imagination—hopes that will never come to pass—expectations that will be extinguished in the quietness and darkness of the grave. In the proper sense of the term, such hopes are no hopes: they are delusions as baseless as the Indian's dream of hunting grounds in "spirit land."

The truth has taught us what men to be wise must recognize, but are most unwilling to learn—that in the state of nature, we are totally without hope or comfort; that sin reigns unto death in every member of the human family; that judgment hath passed upon all men unto condemnation, and that in Christ alone can men be justified unto life eternal. We are by nature the children of wrath. We are born into a state of sin and under condemnation. We are made subject to vanity, though not willingly. We find ourselves mortal in spite of all aspirations after a higher state. We are feeble and corruptible, in spite of lingering traces of a god-like type and angelic powers of mind. Our abhorrence of death and our tenacious clinging to life, do not for a moment stay our progress towards the end of the living; mingle our bones with mother earth we must, love and study as we may. In Adam we are in the grip of an irrevocable destiny which makes us strangers in creation. We cannot contemplate the works of God as ours in any sense. The azure vault of heaven, with its resplendent sun in the daytime and the shining host at night, is magnificent; but not for us, for they fill the ages, while we flutter, like the morning insect, for a few moments, and are gone for ever. The broad and smiling face of the earth, with its countless beauties of land and water, in "ocean depths and spreading wood," is "a thing of beauty and a joy for ever"; but not to such as we—dust and ashes, whose days on earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding. We raise our

eyes to the measureless immensity of the splendid universe around, and think of the Ineffable Being whose power, and wisdom, and love have evolved and sustained them all. But we have to confess, as natural men, we have no acquaintance with Him. We are far from Him ; we have no relation to Him higher than the other works of His power—menials in His great house—here but a short time, unlike the Son who abideth ever.

In this unutterable orphanage which we inherit in Adam—in the consuming dreariness of our abortive being, what joy surrounds this table : what blessedness belongs to the people who know the joyful sound which those symbols represent. They shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance ! Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God ! No longer mere creatures, nor even servants, but sons—elevated to the highest friendship with the Great Intelligence of the Universe—brought into fellowship with the Eternal Power and wisdom which holds all things in the hollow of His hand ! This is, indeed, a greater privilege than we at all times realize : yet it is simply what the heavenly calling means.

Jesus stands before us in the breaking of bread as the impersonation of this glory. He is the intelligence and love of the immeasurable Father focalized in a man, so to speak ; reduced to a compass in which we can see and feel the grasp of love. Our fellowship is with the Father and His Son, but with the Father through the Son, in whom the Father comes nigh to us. The Son is the means and the pledge of the Eternal Father's friendship towards the children of men. God in him comes near, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them. Oh, what unmeasured blessedness, which our dull eyes so feebly see. In him dwelleth all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. In him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. To him is given a name above every name ; angels and principalities and powers being made subject unto him. To him has been confided all power in heaven and in earth, that as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son also quickeneth whom he will, and will release from death's cold grip all hearts attuned to his praise.

We have not seen him, but blessed be God, we believe in him, and love him, and repose in him, with a joy which in its ultimate realization is unspeakable and full of glory. Having heard of him, we stand in him. Though we have heard no voice from heaven, we are where the apostolic work has placed us. The apostles preached, and we believe through their word ; and are seeking now, in obedience, to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. As such, we have been the subject of the Lord's petition to his Father, wherein he said, "Neither pray I for these alone (the eleven), but for them also who shall believe on me through their word."

And now what wait we for ? For his return : his reappearing in power and great glory. Blessed hope ! We look for it : we love it : we pray for it : we live for it. The Gospel has called us to it. Before we knew the Gospel, we were content with the husks that the swine do eat. We were satisfied with the eating and drinking, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, of this animal existence which has occupied the world of the ungodly for thousands of years. We were ignorant of the unsearchable

SEASONS OF COMFORT

riches of Christ. Our eye had not seen, neither our ears heard, nor had it entered into our hearts to conceive what God hath prepared for them that love Him. We were engrossed with the cares of the riches and the pleasures of this life. But now we have turned from these vanities to know the greatness of sonship to God, brotherhood to Christ, and heirship of the glory to be revealed. We strive to harmonize the life we live in the flesh with this faith of the Son of God. We seek to be followers of God, walking in love and purity as becometh saints, and in sobriety as those that have learnt the solemn judgments of God, which are far above, out of the sight of the foolish.

Yet mourn we sore as doves. We walk by faith and not by sight ! And as the Son of God was a man of sorrows so it is with his brethren, who are now in the sorrows of their probation. Sight is all against us. All things continue as they were from the beginning. Vile men are exalted on every side. God speaks not, and men say, " Where is the promise of his coming ? " Yet faith has its strong foundations, to which we cling. We see the Jews scattered ; their land in desolation : God's purpose among the nations carried out. In existing facts, institutions and traditions, we have evidence of Christ's resurrection and first-century work, and in that marvel of literary compositions, the Bible, we have the highest tower of strength, an impregnable fortress, from whose walls the assaulting foe has ever been dashed to destruction among the rocks beneath. Though, therefore, all is night, and the wicked triumph, and the hope of the righteous is mocked, we hold on, looking for the light, watching for the daybreak, waiting for the shadows to flee away at the sun rising—" looking for his appearing."

The graveyards fill, and the generations rush on, and the tale of vanity is told in a thousand mocking tones of woe. We hear an apostle say, " Ye have need of patience." In strenuous endurance, we say, " Yes ; though spoken to the persecuted of the first century, it is no less applicable to the watchers of the nineteenth ; who, amid a widespread travailing in pain, groan within themselves, waiting for the adoption." We hear another say, " Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward " ; and we may say, " Amen ! Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly ! " And our sighs, and struggles, and prayers are not unheeded on high. Have we not a Father who pitieth His children, and guides their conflict with appointed travail, that they may be partakers of His holiness, which they could never know without the bitter cup ? Have we not a High Priest who is touched with the feeling of our infirmity, and whose messages to the seven churches show that he watches and regulates the affairs of his chosen ? Yes, yes. Our privileges are greater than we at all times remember. Our position is more blessed than weak nature will suffer us to realize. We see through a glass darkly. We yearn for the day of seeing him face to face. We know that when he shall appear, we shall see him as he is.

Blessed words ! This is what we agonize for—

“ As a woman counts the days
Till her absent lord she see ;
Longs and watches, weeps and prays,
So, dear Lord, we do for thee ! ”

We hunger and thirst after righteousness. We long to hear the High Priest come forth and pronounce our iniquity pardoned. We sigh to be delivered from this corruptible in which we groan, being burdened. We cry and lament for the prevailing abominations. We crave to taste of purity and power, and joy and immortality. We look for and hasten unto the day of the Lord, when tears shall be wiped from all faces, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. We pray for the earth's deliverance from its present misuse and prostitution. We cry that the wickedness of the wicked may come to an end, and the just be established, and the earth be filled with the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea. We yearn to drink of Jehovah's gladness in the presence of His glorious Son. We have heard the Shepherd's voice, but like bleating lambs on the mountains, we seek him from hill to hill in vain, earnestly desiring to see his face and receive the comfort of his arms. We are dying in the intensity of our desire to rejoice in the pure joy of his glorious countenance, as the sun shining in his strength. We long to join in the anthem of his glorious praise, with his risen and perfected friends, knowing Him as we are known, seeing him as we are seen, delivered from the burden of groanings that cannot be uttered, emancipated from the stammering tongue and muscleless perishing voice, glorified with the power, and freedom, and strength, and beauty of the angels ; our vile body changed and made like to the glorious body of our blessed and beloved Christ. "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, and strength, and dominion, and might, and praise be ascribed unto our God and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

We have long pined in this gloomy wilderness, where the wolves howl and tempests roar with might—a dry and parched land, wherein there is no water. Our flesh longs ; our soul panteth after Thee, O God. When shall we come unto the courts of our God ? We have no rest. We have no continuing city. We seek one to come—the city of our God, of which the Lord God and the Lamb are the light thereof. We are strangers and pilgrims as all the Fathers were. Our eyes run down with tears ; our hearts fail for the waiting of the morning. We are sore broken in this place of dragons. We wait for the Lord. We remember his presence on earth 1,800 years ago. He said, "Do this in remembrance of me." We obey his command. We lift our hearts in gratitude to him in heaven, and strive in patience to wait all the days of our appointed time, as the bride, making ourselves ready, hoping soon to hear the silence of the night broken with the gladsome announcement : "The Lord is come !"

Unprofitable Questions

Paul's work at Ephesus.—Its widespread power and effect.—The cause of this.—His influence with the Gentiles in miraculous works.—Formation of a large ecclesia.—Timothy among them.—Paul's departure and subsequent letter to Timothy.—His object in writing.—The activity of hurtful questions.—The nature of edification.—Hindrances to it.—The modern need for exercising the apostolic precaution.—“Points” and “questions.”—Those in Paul's day.—A change in the “questions” with the progress of time.—Matters that may be casually conversed about but not made the topic of serious debate.—The truth perfectly plain, and glorious as the sun.—Burrowing in the caverns.—The practical purposes of the law and Gospel.—“Sound doctrine.”—Comprehension of these.—Turning from “dead works” frustrated by the discussion of abstractions.—Glib bastards.—The result of Timothy's work in Ephesus.—The Lord's subsequent commendation of the ecclesia.—The lesson as to pretenders.—As to “first love” and “first works.”—The one synonymous with the other in Scripture language.—Our dangers and their remedy.

1 TIMOTHY 1.—Paul writes to Timothy, and we see something for our profit. The letter is sent to Ephesus (where Paul had left Timothy), after the effective labours in that city ten years before. Those labours, it will be recollected, so widely affected the community as to stop a trade in silver shrines, which had beforetime flourished, causing, in consequence, a great stir among “the trade,” and a public uproar, in which several of the brethren suffered violence. The influence was not confined to the city of Ephesus : “all they who dwelt in Asia,” we are told, “heard the Word of the Lord Jesus,” consequent on Paul's labours in Ephesus, “by the space of two years,” and “mightily grew the word of God, and prevailed ; and many that believed came and confessed, and showed their deeds, and brought their books together, and burnt them before all men.” Believers were not only numerous, but influential. We find “certain of the chief of Asia,” described as Paul's friends, during the uproar before referred to (Acts 19 : 31). The testimony for the truth had affected the higher circles of society, and laid hold of the educated and devout-minded among Jews and Gentiles, unlike its experience in our day, when it can operate on the fringes of society merely. The circumstances of the case admitted of such a result. To the Jews Paul had access, as a Jew, in the synagogues, which were open to all ; and he was enabled to arrest Gentile attention by means which are not at the disposal of nineteenth century labourers. “God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul” (Acts 19 : 11). The consequence was the formation of a large ecclesia in Ephesus composed of the better sort, whose well-working was a natural cause of anxiety to him. Paul was with them two years, at the end of which he left them for other parts to see them no more again, except the elders, for whom he sent from Miletus, on a subsequent occasion, when passing. When he departed, he left Timothy behind him. His object in doing so is stated by himself in the chapter read. It was that he (Timothy) might “charge

some that they teach no other (than the right) doctrine." This indicates the existence of a perverting class of brethren in the Ephesian ecclesia, whose evil influence had been perceived by Paul, while still among them, and the tendency of whose exhortations and expositions he says was to "minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith." Herein we have a hint for our guidance, in a day when Paul no longer lives to give us a father's counsel. There are "questions" whose agitation is hurtful, because they are doubtful in themselves and unimportant in their bearings when solved, while the agitation of them interferes with the spiritual result called "godly edifying." The attainment and preservation of "godly edifying" is the great object of the truth, and will be the cue of every true brother's policy. What is this? It is building-up in godliness—a strengthening of the mind in the things pertaining to God. What are these? The hope He has given to us; the obedience He requires of us in the many things commanded; the faith He would have us repose in Him; the love He seeks at our hands towards Himself and our "neighbours"; and the intercourse He desires us to hold with Him in prayer. These, of course, are founded on knowledge of who He is, what He has promised, and what He has done and said, and the commandments He has given by His servants the prophets and the apostles, and of His Son, Jesus Christ. Knowledge of these made effective in the spiritual results for which it was given is the essence of godly edifying. Whatever imparts this knowledge and strengthens the determination to abide in godliness, in all reality of sentiment and action, helps the process of "godly edifying": whatever distracts the attention from these, or weakens resolution in relation to them, is to be avoided as a profitless and positively hurtful strife of words. There is need for applying this principle. There is danger of men's using these "points" and "questions" involved in the truth to the frustration of the whole object of the truth itself, and this not, perhaps, from evil intent, but from certain peculiarities of mental constitution which impel to the discussion of matters best let alone, because in their nature insoluble in the special way they are presented for discussion, or unreducible to a form that will embody the general thought. Against this tendency we must be on our guard. If Paul stationed Timothy at Ephesus to neutralize the influence of "some" who were troublemakers, we need not wonder if nineteenth century experience should disclose a similar necessity (though, unfortunately, the necessity cannot be supplied as it then was). The class will not, necessarily, present the same features. It differs with the circumstances in which it exists. In Paul's day, there were Talmudical and Pagan legends on which to expend their pertinacity and ingenuity, as to the question of their credibility; also questions of pedigree, which, in those days were something thought of; also significances of the law, about which they vainly jangled, understanding neither what they said nor whereof they affirmed, turning aside in the process from that charity out of a pure heart, and a good conscience and faith unfeigned, which Paul declares to be the end of the whole matter. In our day, by a different process, the same class reach the same wretched result of withering their own souls and that of their neighbours, as in a furnace of burning heat, and destroying the healthy and joyous vitality that comes from the pureness and fulness

SEASONS OF COMFORT

of the blessed hope ; which teaches us to denying godliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for the Lord from heaven to change our vile bodies, and to set up the kingdom of God. Questions as to the day when the Lord was glorified ; the state of his blood when he entered the divine presence ; whether Moses is living or dead ; the meaning of certain types in the law ; the relation of death to the millennial population ; the quality of wine used at the breaking of bread, and the bread itself ; the precise value of the sacrifice from a divine point of view ; the relation of God's foreknowledge to free agency, etc., etc., etc., etc., are all matters that may be the casual topic of conversation or even the subject of earnest thought, but which are misplaced when seriously debated, as matters affecting the standing of such as believe and obey the Lord Jesus ; and placed out of the category of usefulness if treated with the incessant zeal of a hobbyist. The crowning glories of the truth shine with the brilliancy of the mid-day sun ; and it indicates a strange obfuscation of mind when men neglect its noonday brightness, to burrow in the caverns of doubtful questions with the dark lanterns of speculation. It looks like a case of loving darkness rather than light.

Timothy was to concentrate the attention of the believers on the practical purposes of the law, about which some were disposed to jangle in an abstract and theoretical way. He was to teach them that the law was not for righteous men, but for the lawless and disobedient, the ungodly and sinners, unholy and profane, whoremongers, stealers, liars, perjured persons, and anything else contrary to *sound doctrine*, ACCORDING TO THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL ; whence arises the reflection that *sound doctrine*, according to Paul's use of that phrase, is comprehensive of correct teaching in matters of duty or morals, as much as in those elementary matters known as " the things concerning the kingdom." It is of the first importance to observe this. The " glorious gospel " comprehends a call to repent from dead works. Paul puts this among first principles (Heb. 6 : 1), a place which reason would assign it ; for of what value are the purposes of God to a man apart from the righteousness and benevolence in which they have their foundation ? Where men have not leant the nature of " dead works," and the imperative duty of turning from them ; they have not perfectly learnt the " glorious Gospel," however lucid may be their apprehension of the nature of man and the nature and purposes of God. The first lesson connected with baptism is that the subjects of it, having been buried with Christ, become dead to sin, and rise to newness of life. It is much to be feared that in the discussion of abstractions, for which the human intellect is not fitted, the practical object of the hope in purifying the believer from " all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord," is lost sight of, or, at all events, not realized in practice. That it is so in many cases is unquestionable, which calls for fear. The unpurified zealot, who compasses sea and land to make a proselyte ; the mere theorist, who is glib in the phrases of the spirit, but in practice unsubject to the law of Christ, is a bastard, and not a son. It will not be a wonder, if in our day, just emerged from all pervading darkness, there be many such. Let all examine themselves. The day of examination is at hand, when character, exposed to view in the electric brightness of the Spirit's standard, may shine

with a different hue from that in which it appears in these dusky and scarce-illuminated shades of death. The Pharisees outwardly appeared righteous unto men, and thought themselves righteous, for they thanked God they were not as other men ; yet, behold the Lord's verdict, which is, doubtless, applicable in many modern instances. Doing things to be seen of men is a practice not yet extinct.

Timothy's part in Ephesus seems to have been successfully performed, if we are to judge by the message the ecclesia received from the Lord Jesus, through John in Patmos, about 35 years afterwards. " I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them that are evil (these were the ' some ' referred to by Paul) : and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars : and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted." The career of the ecclesia during all these years had thus been a satisfactory one, as regarded their repudiation of the " some " who sought to entangle them in irrelevant and profitless controversies about the law and other things ; and, as regards their perseverance in the course required by their profession, as the servants of Christ. In this we have an example. We are surrounded by pretenders, and apostolic pretenders, too. By the word we have found them liars, and have, consequently, come out from among them. From them that are evil, we are also to withdraw, " hating even the garment spotted by the flesh." If these things were commended in the Ephesian ecclesia, the commendation was written that believers, in all subsequent ages, might go and do likewise ; for is it not added, " He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches " ? Consequently, so far as our case may answer to that of Ephesus in these particulars, we may take comfort.

But there is another feature in the case of Ephesus to be noted, which brings warning with it. It is this : " Nevertheless, I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love." This is an intimation that the good thing commended in the early career of this ecclesia had ceased to be characteristic of it. It is not that as a matter of sentiment their enthusiasm had cooled with the progress of time and trial, which is natural enough ; but that the fruits—the " works " that spring from faith—had abated from a weariness in well-doing against which Paul had warned the believers. That this is what is meant is evident from the counsel with which the reproof is associated. " Remember therefore from whence thou art *fallen*, and repent, and *do the first works*." They had stopped doing the first works, which was " leaving their first love." " Love " and " works " are synonymous in the vocabulary of the Spirit. A sentimental love, unaccompanied by obedience, is not accepted. " This is the love of God," says John, " that we *keep his commandments* " (1 John 5 : 3), which is equivalent to the declaration of Christ, " Ye are my friends *if ye do whatsoever I command you* " (John 15 : 14). The Ephesian believers had slackened in their obedience. In this they had left their first love. Herein is our warning. If an ecclesia under apostolic superintendence could so far degenerate from the apostolic standard of conformity to the law of Christ, what may not our danger be who have no living apostle to recall us to our duty ? Against this danger there is only one secure defence, and that is, holding daily interviews with the Spirit in the reading of " what it saith " in its appointed channels of utterance, the writings of

the holy men of old who were moved by it. By this, as Peter intended in the writing of his epistles (2 Pet. 1 : 15 ; 3 : 1, 2), we shall be enabled to have "these things always in remembrance." Giving thus an earnest heed to the things we have heard, we shall not let them slip (Heb. 2 : 1). Continuing in prayer without ceasing, we shall be built up in our most holy faith, and strengthened to that continual abounding in the work of the Lord, which shall secure for us at the coming of the Lord the commendation he bestowed on the ecclesia at Ephesus, without its accompanying rebuke of evil men.

Love and Doctrine

Different sorts of love.—The "love" spoken of by John.—Its foundation.—Love bounded by the truth.—The love that belongs to the household of faith.—Its alleged narrowness a libel.—The true breadth and true wisdom of scripturally restricted love.—Danger of love outside the truth.—Walking in the truth.—Professors and sons.—The latter unknown, but not dreaming.—Love and obedience scripturally synonymous.—Possibility of losing what has been gained.—To "have not God," a strange saying explained.—God to be had only in Christ ; and that the true Christ, not an invented one.—The possibility of believing in Jesus of Nazareth and yet holding "another Jesus."—The common origin of heresy about Christ.—Different doctrines and speculations.—Immaculateness.—The true doctrine of God manifest in seed of David.—The command to receive not those who teach error.—A barrier to fellowship.—A painful situation, but a prospect of blessing.

2 JOHN.—This epistle brings out a few things about "love," which it is important to recognize. "Love" in the world is one thing ; "love" according to the ideal of the sects another ; and the "love" of apostolic discourse yet another. The two former we may dismiss. The world's "love" is an ephemeral affair, having its foundation in the instincts, dying with use and age, and passing away in death. Orthodox "love" is a sickly distortion, lacking the elements that give strength and comeliness to the "love" of the Scriptures. It works spiritual mischief now, and is destined hereafter to vanish like smoke. The "love" of John's epistles has foundations, without which it cannot exist. This partly comes out in the very first sentence of this second epistle : "The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love IN THE TRUTH." Outside the truth, a brother's love is not operative. He loves not the world, neither the things that are in the world, remembering that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2 : 15). His friendships are bounded by the truth, as regards both men and things. In Christ, he is a "new creature" (2 Cor. 5 : 17). After the flesh he knows no man. The friendship of the world is enmity with God (Jas. 4 : 4). Therefore he cultivates no friendship with those who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. His love is bounded by the truth.

Does he, therefore, shut up his bowels of compassion against those who are without God? By no means. He recognizes the obligation put upon him by the same law, to salute not his brethren only, but to do good unto all men, as he has opportunity, even to his enemies. But there is a difference between doing good to unbelievers and cultivating friendship with them; and the saint is careful to observe this difference, lest he come under the rebuke that greeted the ears of Jehoshaphat, on his return from friendly co-operation with Ahab: "Shouldst thou help the ungodly, and love them that hate the Lord? Therefore is wrath upon thee from before the Lord" (2 Chron. 19 : 2). We can have our conversation towards the world in all courtesy and benevolence, without going on to their ground, and joining affinity in schemes of pleasure, profit or friendship.

The "love" that belongs to the household of faith is "*for the truth's sake, that dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.*" This is John's definition of its source and scope. Everyone that is truly of the household, responds instinctively to it. To the carnal mind it appears very "narrow," but this is an illusion of ignorance. It is the true breadth, for it relates to that which *shall be for ever*, while the world, which would have us unequally yoked, passeth away. The truth connects us with "the shoreless ocean of eternity," while the friendship of the world is confined to "a narrow neck of land"—the brief existence of this animal probation. The at present "narrow" operation of apostolic "love" is also founded in wisdom; for unrestricted friendship with the world is full of danger: it draws away from the fear of God, the hope of the calling, and the holiness of the Master's house, "whose house are we, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end." It is therefore a snare; pleasant and advantageous meantime, but having the suction of the maelstrom with it, drawing us to death; for when the Lord of Light stands on earth, to set in order destiny, according to the Father's purpose, the world will have, from his presence, "fled away."

John rejoiced concerning those to whom he wrote that he had found them "walking in the truth." Saints walk not otherwise. Their actions, plans of life, friendships, aims, enterprises, hopes—everything connected with them, in some way or other comes from, originates in, and is conformed to the truth. The truth is their inspiration—the controlling energy. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature"—not that all answer to this. There are professors who serve not the Lord Jesus, but themselves; but such are abortions and bastards. None but sons will be gathered in the day of the 144,000. They are few now, as they have always been, and the world "knoweth" them not in many senses; but they know what they are about. They are not dreaming; they are not fanatics. They are the children of wisdom; and wisdom is justified of them all, though they may be hard to read sometimes. They understand the world too well to be entrapped into its fellowship. They are known of God, and will be publicly revealed in due time, in glory, honour and immortality. Meanwhile they "walk in the truth." On this ground they are to be met and understood. Approached on any other ground, they will seem not what they are. They are not to be comprehended "after the flesh."

"This is love," says John, "that we walk after his commandments." No man loves after the Spirit's fashion who disobeys. Apostolic "love" is

SEASONS OF COMFORT

that state of enlightenment and appreciation in relation to the things of God that impels a man to be "a doer of the word." John gives this an application that was special to his day ; and yet is at all times appropriate wherever the same need and the same danger manifest themselves. "This is the commandment," he says, "that as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it." We are wondering what he means when presently the light dawns ; "for many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus is come in the flesh." He means that they should hold fast to the doctrine of Christ as originally delivered ; because many were drawing the disciples away therefrom. The obedience of this commandment is the evidence of New Testament "love," and it is also necessary for our acceptable standing before the presence of the Lord's glory at his coming. This is John's view, as evident from the words immediately following : "*Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.*" There would have been no need for these words if the things that had been "wrought" were not imperilled by the doctrine of the deceivers of which he is speaking.

He indicates, in strong language, the consequences to the individual ensnared by the deceivers : "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ *hath not God.*" This may seem a strange saying in view of the fact that the "deceivers" referred to believed in one God, the Creator of heaven and earth ; and also in Christ, after their own fashion. But the apparent strangeness disappears when we look closely at the matter John is writing about. To "have" God in the sense of John's words, is to stand in His favour, both now and hereafter. All things are in His goodness. As David says, "Thy goodness is over all thy works" : but the goodness of God in common benefits that come upon all alike, is a different thing from that personal "favour" which guides, attends, and prospers (even if by chastisement), with a view to a perpetual sonship in the spirit-nature. The enjoyment of this favour is a thing of conditions. One of those conditions is a recognition of the channel in which He offers it. Out of Christ, sinners cannot come near. They have the goodness of God as creatures, like the sparrows, not one of which can fall to the earth without the Father's knowledge ; but they are not in the privilege of children. They have not the Father's favour and purpose concerning the ages to come. This is only to be enjoyed in Christ ; but even here, it must be the Christ of God's appointing. Any other than this is presumption, and a mockery of His wisdom : and they who teach otherwise than the truth concerning Christ, preach another Christ, though it be intended to refer to the Christ of Nazareth. This is evident from the case of those to whom John is referring. They believed that the person known as Jesus of Nazareth was the Christ ; but in their reasonings upon him, they reasoned away the truth about him, and consequently believed and preached another Jesus than the Son of the Father. There were different sorts of the class, but all their heresies had a common origin in an attempt to bring the mystery of godliness within the rules of human reason, instead of accepting the testimony with humble and childlike simplicity. One set argued that such a character as Jesus was a moral impossibility in flesh and blood, and that, therefore, his whole life was a mere accommodation on the part of a spiritual being to the senses of mortals. Another, believing him to be flesh and blood,

philosophized in a contrary direction, concluding that as such, he must, from the nature of things, have been a "mere man," and that the idea of his being God in flesh-manifestation, was preposterous. The Papacy blended the two and taught that though flesh, his flesh was not the corrupt and mortal flesh of men, but a superior, clean, "immaculate" sort. In our own day, as recent painful experience has made us aware, a class of believers are treading the same dangerous ground, in teaching that the flesh of Jesus was destitute of that which, in the flesh of his brethren, constitutes the cause or source of mortality.

In relation to all of them, John's declaration reveals the mind of the Spirit: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, *hath not God*. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." The doctrine of Christ is that he is God made and manifested in the mortal flesh of Abraham's race for the deliverance thereof, on His own principles, from "that having the power of death." Those who hold fast to this have both the Father and the Son; for in Jesus they have the Son, and the Father manifest in him.

As to those who "bring not this doctrine," John's commandment is: "Receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed!" This command we can no more evade than any other commandment delivered unto us. The obedience of it may cost us something. It is crucifying to the flesh to refuse friends—some of them excellent people as human nature goes—who in one way or other have been seduced from their allegiance to the doctrine of Christ; but there is no alternative. Friends are but for a moment; the truth is for ever; and if we sacrifice our duty to the latter from regard to the former, the latter will sacrifice us in the day of its glory, and hand us over to the destiny of the flesh, which, as the grass, will pass away.

"He that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." This applies to all without distinction, and erects a barrier to fellowship with even some who hold the truth; for though they may hold the doctrine of Christ themselves, yet, if they keep up a "God-speed" connection with those who do not, by John's rule they make themselves partakers with them, and, therefore, cut themselves off from those who stand for the doctrine of Christ.

The epistle, as a whole, is singularly applicable to the situation in which we find ourselves this morning. We have been obliged to stand aside for the doctrine of Christ from some we love. The Epistle of John justifies us in our course, both as regards those who have departed from the doctrine of Christ, and those who, while holding on to it themselves, see not their way to break connection with those who have departed. It is a painful situation, but we must not falter, nor need we fear or be discouraged. God is with us in the course of obedience, and we shall see His blessing in the increase, in our midst, of zeal and holiness, and love and preparedness for the great day of the Lord, which is at hand.

Submission to Human Law

The waiting position to which the Gospel calls us.—An apparently right but wrong conclusion.—Our present relation to the powers that be.—Passive strangers preparing for futurity.—No power but of God.—God rules in the kingdom of men.—The future kingdom.—Heirs thereof nothing to do with State questions.—Yet they owe their respect to State authorities.—The Quakers wrong.—The present governments serve a good purpose.—Duty of disciples to submit.—Pay all dues, even church rates.—Saints not responsible for the State's use of the money.—Duty of brethren not to get into debt.—Wrong to borrow thoughtlessly.—The Lord at hand.—A beautiful traffic.

ROMANS 13.—BELOVED BROTHERS AND SISTERS,—The chapter read this morning contains guidance upon a subject having an important bearing upon us in the truth, and one upon which the very reception of the truth creates a necessity for guidance. The position to which the Gospel calls us is that of waiting for the Lord from heaven, of whom the truth teaches that he is King of kings and Lord of lords ; that he is the rightful governor of the nations ; that in due time, there will be no other power upon earth, and no other law recognized but his own. Now, without guidance, we might argue that these things being true, we are absolved from allegiance to the powers that now exist ; that we are consequently under no obligation to obey. The chapter comes in and stops any such apparently right conclusion. I say *apparently* right ; it is only apparently so ; because the truth does not teach us that Christ's kingdom now exists. Campbellism would teach us that ; the logical upshot of which would be rebellion against kings and governments. If the government of Christ is now in force in the earth, it would be natural to say : " We recognize no king but Christ, and decline to obey the laws of other rulers." But the truth teaches us that the power of the Lord Jesus, as king over the whole earth, is not to come into practical force until his return at the season appointed for the manifestation of the sons of God. Then the Lord will be king over all the earth : there will be but one Lord. All other lords will be broken like a potter's vessel. The present question is, What is, meanwhile, our relation to the powers that be ? In answer to that question, this chapter tells us something that prevents us from being rebels against the authorities of the time, or from being political plotters or political agitators in any shape. It prevents us, indeed, from taking any part in the political movements of the time, and shuts us up to the position of " strangers and pilgrims," whose energy is all required for the work of preparing for the great administration of authority that is to come on earth in God's appointed time, of which we shall have a share, if God account us worthy.

" Let every soul be subject to the higher powers." This passage practically deals with the question : " How can we, who are subject to God, submit to those who are opposed to Him ? " The answer is, that although on the surface it appears otherwise, there is no power but what is of God. The kings of the earth have one object in what they do, and God, who controls them, has another. The king of Assyria went against

Israel for his own aggrandizement ; but, in reality, he was an instrument invisibly wielded by God against his people. "Howbeit," said the prophet, "*he meaneth not so*" (Isa. 10 : 7). He does it to aggrandize himself, but he cannot go beyond his appointed line. "Shall the rod shake itself against him who uses it ?" So it is with all the kingdoms of the earth ; God is making use of them ; God superintends them by the angels of His power. Daniel tells us, in a sense that does not conflict with the Gospel of the kingdom, that He ruleth in the kingdoms of men, setting up some and putting down others. The kingdoms now existing are provisionally of God's appointment. God's purpose to make the earth a habitation of order, love, intelligence, and glory, requires a preliminary prevalence of evil, and yet the evil must be regulated. If evil were allowed to run riot, it would make the world a desert in which it would be impossible for the preliminary work of trial in patient obedience to be done ; we could never assemble here this morning if evil were not controlled in its operations. There is a necessity for a certain machinery to exist, and God has appointed that machinery, but only for mechanical service. It is, so to speak, but the scaffolding for the erection of the future building. They are a crude work ; the saints are called to a higher work in all respects. Even now, it is highest work to preach the gospel of the future kingdom.

Paul's explanations on this point are perfectly necessary. These governments are of God's appointment ; therefore, if you resist them, you will be resisting God. The truth teaches us to be the most obedient subjects in the realm. It imposes upon us the attitude of subjects, having nothing to do with State questions, except to obey, and give honour and respect to the constituted authorities for the time being, when their commands do not conflict with what God requires. Submission and respect, in these circumstances, are a duty. We disobey if we refuse them. The Quaker who refuses to comply with the requirements of the Court, is no model for a Christadelphian. He won't take off his hat : in this he thinks he stands on scriptural ground. He does the opposite. The taking off the hat in the presence of the king is a mere conventional respect, which we are, apostolically, bound to yield. The Quakers are very disobedient to the apostles in many things, although they profess so much to be exemplary.

Then Paul urges as a sort of collateral consideration, that governors are not a terror to those who do right, which is true, apart from the special experiences of the believers in Paul's day, and Paul does not refer to them. Writing to the Romans before the authorities at Rome had lent themselves to the work of persecution, his remarks have probable reference to their lenity, and not to the rulers of the Jews, at whose hands he had experienced the principal part of his sufferings. His dealings with the Roman authorities up to the time of writing, had rather been in the way of invoking their protection ; as when he was seized in Jerusalem and rescued from the mob by the Roman soldiers, and again when his status as a Roman freeman was recognized as a protection against scourging, and again when the Roman captain gave him an escort to Cæsarea, to get him out of the way of a Jewish plot to kill him, and again when he claimed the protection of the Roman law as against Jewish intrigue. "I stand at Cæsar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged : to the Jews I have done no wrong . . . I appeal unto Cæsar." In a general way, the statement is true of all govern-

SEASONS OF COMFORT

ments, that it is only the evilly disposed who suffer from them ; with those who are submissive the authorities have nothing to do but protect them. Apart from bad laws, they inflict hardship on those only who do evil ; as Peter says, " Who is he that will harm you if ye follow that which is good ? " " Wherefore," says Paul, summarizing his argument, " we must be in subjection, not only for wrath, but for conscience sake." That is, not only as a matter of expediency in the sense of keeping on the favourable side of the law, but as a matter of principle, the disciples of Christ have nothing to do with the rulers but to be subject—not to resist, nor to take any part in the process of resisting, what they do, or may think well to do. In this aspect it is apparent it would be much out of place for brethren or sisters to take part in the movements to overthrow governments, movements, which even if successful, we know would bring nothing but anarchy ; but whether successful or not successful, we are excluded from taking part in till the Lord himself begins. " Render to all their dues : tribute to whom tribute is due ; custom to whom custom ; fear to whom fear ; honour to whom honour." Church-rates to whom Church-rates ; it is no business of ours what the governments do with the money they extort from us in the shape of tribute. The tribute, levied on the Christians in Rome, went to pay for the support of idolatrous temples ; how unscripturally, therefore, many are acting, who have a great reputation for being wise, and who are in their own way very honest, who suffer restraint rather than pay Church-rates. It is really simple in them to let the State take £20 in the shape of goods sold under value, when they could get off by paying £5. It is not a matter of conscience ; we have nothing to do with the uses to which the State puts the money. All we have to do is to pay when ordered, and see that we do not countenance the abominations which they uphold. The " rights of man " are no standard for the action of a Christian ; abstractly, God only has " rights." Our only concern is, to know what He would have us to do on this point. His will is plain. We are to submit, " looking for the blessed hope " of the manifestation of His power, in which the saint is to participate after trial. We need not and must not reach our hands to the political machinery which at present exists. We know how hopeless it is for human efforts to make the world better, for the world is 6,000 years old in the experiment of human good, and as far off as ever from the condition of things desired. Effective good requires infallible wisdom and infallible power. When these are on the earth, it will be a satisfaction and a glory to have to do with government. At present it is vexation of spirit. Stand aloof from human movements and lay hold on God's movement, which He has given us the honour of assisting.

Another thing mentioned in this chapter is equally important in its way, though more of a private character. Do not get into debt. " Owe no man anything but love " ; it is an apostolic precept. You can be under a debt of gratitude as much as you like, but keep money out of the obligation ; this is good advice, even apart from precept, but here is precept, therefore a binding rule on those who submit to apostolic law. There are many evils connected with debt. " The borrower is servant to the lender." The debt is something between you which has power to cloud friendship ; it is always an anxiety ; a worm that gnaws the roots of joy. At last, perhaps, it is a seed of hatred and strife. Keep the air clear of debt, and the

sun will have a better chance. But some say we cannot help it, and doubtless there are times when people cannot help it, but in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred they can help it, by denying themselves. The advantages that come of the borrowing are very dearly bought, in a higher than a commercial sense. Most borrowers find that out by experience, but it is better not to let experience teach in this matter, since we have a command ; it is better to obey the command and not to get into debt ; a recognition of duty in this matter will greatly help. There is nothing like duty as the motive principle of life ; applied to this matter, it would save worlds of trouble. Acting on this principle of not getting into debt, people would be saved much trouble. Once get into debt, the difficulty of getting out is greater than dreamt of, but some people do not think about it. They see an opportunity ; they conceive a desire in a certain direction ; and borrowing is as easy with them as possible. This is wrong. They have no business to handle money that is not their own ; they are not sure they will live to repay ; their health may fail, prospects may desert them and the lender is robbed, and that the lender may have plenty is no weakening of the obligation to give him his own. In our circumstances, it is specially important to be particular on this point. The Lord may be upon us any day, and how discomfiting for him to find us with hands and feet tied in debt and unable to do anything for his name, for the burden we have taken on our shoulders. There is nothing but wisdom in this precept : a noble-hearted lender may forgive debt ; but we must not presume on this ; nay, rather refuse to be forgiven and insist on the advantage of being free and independent. Shut your ears to flattering projects. Say not, " I will pay up in a year." Ye know not the year is yours. Even if ye live, things may go wrong, and ye in a fix will have to say with humiliation, " I would pay but I cannot." Traffic in love without limit, for love is the fulfilling of the law. We are allowed to contract indefinite obligations in this direction ; the interest is sweet to the payer and receiver, and leaves a man richer in the article when paid. At the same time, beware of counterfeits ; beware of such as talk of love, and on the strength of it get into debt and bear false witness. Love is the fulfilling of the law only in the sense that it is the sentiment that leads to the spontaneous doing of what the law enjoins, and abstinence from what it forbids. It will not do to put love in the place of obedience ; this is characteristic of the false religions of the day. We must always guard against the misapplication of good principles, that we may see the right fulfilment of all in the Kingdom of God.

The Gifts of the Spirit

Apostolic circumstances no parallel in modern experience.—Gifts of the Spirit.—Sectaries in the first ecclesias.—Division and the gifts of the Spirit.—Paul written to.—1 Cor. answers to questions.—Calling Jesus accursed.—How a man having the Spirit could call him accursed.—Inspiration not common to men.—No man calling Jesus Lord but by the Spirit.—Christ's Messiahship not to be known apart from the Spirit.—The apostolic testimony, the testimony of the Spirit.—This fact wrenched from its meaning in modern times.—Philosophy and theology both dangerous.—The unity of the Spirit though diversity of operation.—The same fact in Nature.—The co-relation of force.—The body of Christ a future development, though now germinally existent.—Mere fragments at present.—Unseen in most cases.—Perfection of symmetry and sympathy in the future.

1 CORINTHIANS 12.—There are several things in this chapter interesting and important to be understood, but not apparent on the surface. To discern them, it is necessary to have distinctly in view the people to whom the epistle was written, and the time and circumstances under which it was addressed to them. If we were to read it from a modern point of view—that is, as if Paul were discussing principles applicable to modern circumstances, we should make many mistakes. Paul is discoursing on a situation of things existing in his own day, and having no parallel in our experience. The situation is very simply described. A number of people in Corinth, brought up in a mixed state of philosophy and idolatry, had believed the testimony of Paul on the occasion of his visit to the city, concerning the resurrection of Christ, and the benefits offered to those who should believe and obey the risen Master. Their belief was based upon the signs and wonders by which Paul's word was accompanied. God gave testimony to the word of His grace in signs and wonders and gifts of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 2 : 4), so that their faith "stood not in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God" (1 Cor. 2 : 5). After they believed, the Holy Spirit was given to them also, by the laying on of the apostles' hands, so that they also were able to speak with tongues, work miracles, prophesy, speak the words of wisdom and knowledge, etc. Paul stayed with them a good while, even "a year and six months" (Acts 18 : 11), for Christ had told him that he had much people in the city (verse 10). After Paul left them, various questions began to arise among them as to duty in this and that, in the new position in which the truth had placed them. Some held one opinion and some another upon the various matters that arose. There were also sectaries among them—men who did not rise to the breadth and greatness of the unity that was in Christ, but conceived petty partialities for certain leaders and teachers. Some said, "I am of Paul," as against others who boasted to the disparagement of Paul, that they were of Peter; while others again made Apollos the watchword, and others, Christ. The existence of such a state of division in a community blessed with the gifts of the Spirit will appear inexplicable to those who have not realized that those gifts did not override the judgment and temperamental peculiarities of the possessors; but were

restricted to the particular function appertaining to them. A speaker of tongues was the same individual in the manifestation of character as if he had not received a supernatural knowledge of the languages. A worker of miracles was not made infallible by the impartation of the power to heal. Those having the gift of knowledge and wisdom would be reliable guides ; but they do not appear to have been deferred to, to their full extent. And this would be accounted for by the probable argument that one man with a gift of the Spirit was as good as another with a different gift. Thus, the man having the power to interpret tongues, if he differed in judgment from the brother who had the word of wisdom, might feel justified in maintaining his own opinion on the ground that he also having the Spirit, had as much right to form a judgment of the matter as another having the same Spirit in another form. In this disordered state, they appear to have written to Paul to give his mind on the various questions raised. This fact comes out in the 1st verse of the 7th chapter : " Now concerning the THINGS *whereof ye wrote unto me.*" The last ten chapters, including the one that has been read, follow this sentence. It is, therefore, probable that they deal with questions that had been asked by the Corinthians in their letter. Indeed, the style is decidedly indicative of this fact. Take the first verse of the chapter read for instance : " Now concerning spiritual gifts " ; this is not the way a man writes who is dealing spontaneously with the subject. It is just the style of a man who is answering questions that have been submitted to him ; who having done with one, is proceeding to another. It is, therefore, probable that Paul's judgment had been asked on the matters discussed in the chapter. This supposition greatly aids the comprehension of it.

" Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led " (1 Cor. 12 : 2). This allusion to their antecedents prepares the way for the attitude he is about to take as their teacher, and also lays a basis for the argument he is about to advance. As much as to say, " Ye know that apart from what I brought to you, ye were idolaters, without hope, without inheritance in Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise. The gifts that ye have, were acquired by you in connection with the Gospel. Therefore, the Gospel is the standard by which the questions in agitation must be decided. ' Wherefore, I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed ' " (verse 3).

Now, how came Paul to have to make this apparently superfluous declaration ? Obviously, because there were some among the Corinthians calling Jesus accursed, who professed to speak by the Spirit. How could such a thing be ? This is only to be understood in view of the surroundings and extraction of the Corinthians. The Grecians have been termed the philosophers of the world. The Corinthians lived in one of the principal cities of the Greeks, and at one of the principal seats of philosophy. It was very natural, therefore, that philosophy should crop up in their midst as a perverter of the phenomena connected with the Spirit. Indeed, in the case of another Greek ecclesia—that at Colosse, he expressly says, " Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit." Now upon what principle of philosophy could any man take the attitude of a detractor of Jesus, and yet claim to be speaking by the Spirit ? I could under-

SEASONS OF COMFORT

stand such a case to arise in this way. A worldly thinker, brought in by the preaching of Paul and the novelty of the gifts, remains submissive to apostolic principles for a while, but bringing his secular philosophy to bear, aided by intercourse with the philosophic alien, gradually comes to regard the Gospel movement as but a peculiar form of universal truth. Such a man would come to esteem highly the writers and thinkers and orators of Greece, and to contend that although there was doubtless good in the apostolic system, and a greater measure of good than in Paganism, that yet as a whole it was narrow and unphilosophical ; that Jesus, dying by crucifixion, was accursed by the very system which he said he came to fulfil ; that it was unreasonable to suppose that God intended an accursed man to hold the position of supremacy taught by the apostles, especially to the exclusion of " the wise and good " men of philosophic fame. The inspired teachers in the ecclesia would, of course, oppose such a doctrine ; and declining to argue it philosophically, might assert the authority of the Spirit in them as sufficient to close the mouth of the objector. In answer to which the objector might say, " I also have the Spirit : I received it equally with you : in fact all men have the Spirit—the poets and philosophers of Athens, as well as the apostles, and therefore we have as much right to maintain our convictions as you." If the man or men were clever and loquacious, their words would stagger the faith of some, and be difficult of confutation. Accordingly Paul was written to : " Can a man have the Spirit who calls Jesus accursed ? " Paul's answer is " No ! " and on the general question of all men being inspired, he says " The things of God KNOWETH NO MAN, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God ; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God " (1 Cor. 2 : 11, 12).

The next statement of Paul I understand also to apply to the cavils of the same objector : " No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Spirit." The necessity for making that statement might arise in this way. In dealing with the man calling Jesus accursed while claiming to speak by the Spirit, the spiritual men of the ecclesia might point out to him that but for the Spirit coming into their midst by Paul, they never would have known about Christ at all. In answer to which, the caviller might contend that the knowledge of Christ was as much a thing of natural cognition as any other matter of history. He would say that although they knew it first by Paul, that was a mere accident ; Paul happened to be first on the ground : but that if he hadn't come, they would have heard of so stirring an historical incident in some other way. This would give rise to the point met by Paul's declaration, " Can a man know that Jesus is the Lord without the instrumentality of the Spirit ? " The truthfulness of Paul's answer is apparent in many ways. To see or hear of the power of Christ was not to be made to know that he was the Messiah, the Lord. The Pharisees saw him, but did not believe. His appearance conveyed no intimation of the fact. As the prophet had predicted, " He had no form nor comeliness ; and when they saw him, there was nothing in him that they should desire him." His Messiahship requires to be testified by the Spirit and confirmed by the Spirit. It was not to be known apart from this. Hence when Peter confessed that he was the Christ, Jesus said, " Flesh and blood hath not revealed this unto thee, but my Father who is in heaven."

How? Not by the Spirit filling Peter and mechanically convincing him as it were (for the "Holy Spirit was not yet given" in that sense—John 7:39); but by the testimony the Father gave to Jesus on two notable occasions in the presence of Peter, and on one of them before a multitude. At his baptism and transfiguration, "A voice came from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son; hear ye him." No man could know apart from the Spirit that Jesus was the Lord. When men heard the apostles afterwards, as the Corinthians heard Paul, they heard the Spirit, for the Spirit was in them, as Jesus had promised. The co-operating works of the Spirit in healing, raising the dead, speaking with tongues, were evidences of the testimony being the Spirit's testimony; but apart from that testimony, no man would say that Jesus is the Lord. As a matter of human knowledge, it was unattainable; and therefore the philosophic caviller was sporting himself with his own deceivings in contending as many do in our own day, with Renan at their head, that the Lord Jesus was a mere phenomenal manifestation of moral power, to be recognized and understood on natural principles.

But Paul's words in our day are greatly wrested from their meaning. They are made to teach that no man can say that Jesus is Lord unless he is personally and supernaturally illuminated by the Holy Spirit. This is a self-evident absurdity. We all here present confess that Jesus is the Lord; and we do it heartily, with joyful and grateful emphasis, yet we deny that we are subjectively illuminated in the way contended for in orthodox circles. We are only illuminated in this way, that the Spirit uttering its voice in the earth 1,800 years ago, and causing its words to be recorded, has furnished us with evidence that convinces our understandings that Jesus is the Lord: and apart from the means it instituted to this end, we never would have known the fact, and therefore could never have stated it. In this sense, still, no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Spirit, but this is a very different sense from the orthodox sense which requires that God shall inspire us before we can know His truth, although He has sent us inspired preachers for the very purpose of causing us to know that faith might come by *hearing* their word. Furthermore, the people who claim to be thus inspired, it is easy to show, do not confess the truth revealed by the Spirit concerning the Lordship of Jesus in many important elements. We must take care, while steering clear of the atheistical philosophy of ancient and modern times, not to run into mistakes in the opposite direction, which are only a little less ruinous.

Paul's remarks on the unity in diversity of the gifts of the Spirit may also be understood as a reply to the same class of objectors, while furnishing information useful to those not in that position. When the official brethren of the ecclesia claimed, in the controversies that arose, to speak with authority in the name of the Spirit amongst them, the caviller of the class in question, of whom so many specimens are to be found in modern times, might well be supposed to say, "You talk of the Spirit; and you point to the various things that are done, but we cannot see in them an evidence of the Spirit. They are more like the feats of conjurers. If it were one Spirit, would it not show itself in the same way in every person having it?" "Like causes produce like effects," they might say, with the dogmatic sapience of a philosophy which has proved itself so many times in opposition to the truth.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

“How can we answer this?” the Corinthian believers may well be imagined to ask Paul. The answer is: “There are diversities of gifts, but *the same Spirit*.” And there is more philosophy in Paul’s answer than the ancient philosophers knew. The law is found to operate even in the natural body, which he afterwards makes use of as an illustration. Hearing is different from smelling; and tasting from seeing; and feeling different from both. Yet if you examine the nerve substance employed in the generation of these different sensations, you find it is exactly the same in all cases. Put it under a microscope, or test it with chemics, and you can discern no difference in the constitution of the nerve-fibre of the ear, eye, nose, tongue, or skin. And the vital energy developed from the blood by the secreting vessels, and supplied to these various functions, is exactly the same—“different manifestations, *but the same spirit*.” Go wider still. Range the broad domain of Nature, examine all phenomena, and you get at last to what is now termed scientifically the “co-relation of forces”; that is, you come to see that the various powers denominated heat, light, strength, cohesion, gravitation, are but the manifestation of a common primal, simple, indefinable force: “different manifestations, *but the same spirit*.” Why is the same force one thing in one relation and another in another? There is no more philosophical answer than the one given by Paul: “All these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally *as he will*.” The will of the Spirit—the appointment of the Creator—is the ultimate explanation of all things. The Corinthian philosophers were, therefore, not so wise as they imagined when they pointed to the diversity of the gifts as a disproof of the apostolic theory of the Spirit. In fact, it was a case of “professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.”

There is another feature of the chapter that had time permitted it would have been profitable to have dwelt upon: and that is where Paul speaks of the unity and comeliness of the body of Christ. I would only take time to say that it is a great mistake to look for the realization of what Paul says, in our present position. The perfect, complete, glorious body of Christ will not be seen till put together in all its parts at his coming, when he will present it to himself “a glorious church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.” It is now but being developed. The merest fragment exists in our day. To look on that fragment as the body of Christ would be a mistake calculated to inspire disgust and destroy heart in the whole matter. It is as when a manufacturer is getting up a splendid article to send to an international exhibition. It is got up in pieces; and an unskilled eye, seeing one of those pieces in the grimy workshop, unfinished and among dirt and litter, would form a very unfavourable idea of it. If he were ignorant of the plan and the pieces, he would be disgusted to be told that that unsightly piece of metal was to dazzle the eyes of courtiers at the world’s fair. At present we are in the polishing shop; and we are but a very minute part of the mechanism—as it were a bolt or pin. The eye of intelligence looks at the situation and is not disappointed because things are at present so unartistic, so unlovely, so un-Christlike, in many ways. The world looks not with the eye of intelligence, but looks at Christ’s work in the workshop stage and jeers. Well, we can afford to bear this. We know that a glorious work is being done, and that all who profess the

truth are not Christlike; that there is, nevertheless, being developed by the truth a people, here and there, who will form constituents of that great body Christ, in which there will be all symmetry and sympathy. We look forward, with the eye of faith, to the complete body—the principal members of which are now in the dust. Meanwhile, as regard the duties of our present position, we accept the professed friends of Christ, as the body of Christ in our day, towards which we are to be faithful and kind—"good unto all men," but specially those who are of the household of faith. We know not who are Christ's. We must leave that to the Judge of all the earth, who will do right. We must, in the dulness and bitterness of the time, do our duty, even unto kindness to the unthankful and the evil, in the full prospect of that day when, if we thus sow to the Spirit, we shall reap life and everlasting joy.

Holiness

The present objects of the truth.—Holiness.—What is it?—Moral philosophy artificial.—Obedience to commandment the only rule of righteousness.—Worship required of saints.—Nature of true worship.—Christ's coming, near to every one.—No gap in death.—The Lord at the end of every man's journey.—A comforting and purifying thought.—The new position of a man who obeys the truth.—The great anxiety when Christ comes.—The rule of judgment.—The way to learn it.—Mere polemics dangerous.—Saints ought morally to be the kingdom of God in miniature.

It is well, brethren and sisters, that we should live under the constant recollection of the fact which we have just been setting forth in song—the omnipresence of God. If we did, we should succeed to a greater extent than we do in the great objects of our calling. It is true that those objects are not to be finally realized until the Lord comes, and calls from the dead those of his friends who are sleeping in the dust, and to his wedding-feast such amongst the living as are worthy of being associated with him. But there are objects connected with our calling that must be realized even now, before we can be permitted to participate in the far greater associations to be developed at the Lord's return. We are called at present to sustain a certain attitude, and that attitude has many sides to it. We are called to the attitude of witnesses for the truth; but that is insufficient of itself to give us a participation in the kingdom of God. No man who merely believes the truth and speaks of it to his neighbour, will be saved; for we find mention of some to be rejected in that day who will say, "Have we not preached in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works?" If our fitness rises no higher than an apprehension and agitation of the theory of the truth, we are not fit for the kingdom of God. The truth is intended to hew us, intellectually and morally, into a certain shape: that shape is the shape of Christ. We have him for an example, and if we do not follow his example, we shall not stand with him in the day of his glory. We are called to holiness. Now that word is a very expressive and com-

SEASONS OF COMFORT

prehensive one : holiness is a state of cleanness, and cleanness in its moral relations consists of freedom from all that is constituted morally polluting by the law of God. That is right which God commands—that is wrong which He forbids. That is holy which He calls clean, and that is unholy which He disallows. There is no other rule of righteousness than that. The moral philosophy of the world is a very artificial affair. In most cases, it is an attempt to justify the commandments of God on natural principles. Certain maxims have been brought to the notice of the world in the teaching of Christ, and men of carnal minds, utterly unsubject to the law of God, have taken hold of the mere æsthetic beauties of these things, and constructed out of them a philosophy of their own—a standard of their own ; but in point of fact they have no standard ; there is no standard of right except the will of God. When men begin to talk of “ the eternal fitness of things,” they get into an intellectual morass. There is no standard of righteousness, but obedience to God’s commandments.

God’s commandments are unmistakable ; they are so very simple that we are liable to forget them, and if we forget them, we cannot be saved. We must keep them in remembrance, and act upon them, especially the last. It is the doing of them that is acceptable. It is not sufficient to acknowledge them. “ Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say ? ” Now Christ says we are to be kind to each other, and if we are not so, however much we may know the truth, we do not belong to him ; the knowledge of the truth will then be to our condemnation.

“ If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” Now besides kindness, the spirit of Christ was a spirit of worship. He often retired to pray ; and he told the woman of Samaria that the Father sought a certain class (in spirit and in truth) to worship Him. What is the worship of God, brethren and sisters ? It is the deferential and reverential concentration of the mind upon Him, intelligently, consciously, lovingly, adoringly, trustingly, and prayerfully, with a deep sense of the things disclosed concerning Him and us in the truth. It is an attitude of mind requiring the highest abstraction. Merely to sing is not to worship, nor is it to deliver a well-worded address to the Deity. There is such a thing as drawing near with the lips while the heart is far away. This was the worship that God abhorred in Israel, and it will be no more acceptable at our hands in the name of Jesus. We require to abstract our minds from surroundings and fix them on the mighty Universal Presence in whose hand our breath is, and whose are all our ways.

This mental attitude, whether in an individual or in an assembly, will produce indifference to immediate surroundings. It cannot co-exist with attention to these surroundings. If, therefore, in singing, you see some look about to see what neighbours are doing ; or speak and whisper with his neighbours, or attending to any second matter whatever, you are yourself interfered with in the luxury of worship, and perceive evidence of a want of worship in the disturber. This is an evil. The worship of God requires all our attention—a complete fixing of our mind upon Him, knowing that His ear is open and that His eye is upon us. As David expresses it : “ Thou hast beset me behind and before. Thou understandest my thought afar off . . . The darkness and the light are both alike to thee.” Now, our meetings are designed for the collective exercise of this thought, and the

possessors of holiness will be full of responsive sympathy to this supreme object of our association. We ought all to be so conditioned mentally that when we stand up to sing, we sing to God and do not go through a performance merely. A performance is abhorrent to God and all holy men. It is one of the abominations of our time that mere performances take place as a professed act of collective worship. It would be better to have bad music with a general concentration of the mind on God and His truth, than the finest strains with an absence of that concentration.

Now we must pay attention to those things, for the present is all important to us. It will be too late to mend our ways when Christ comes ; and Christ's coming is not very far from every one of us. This statement is one that has been true ever since the time of the apostles, and it finds illustration in the chapter that has just been read. "Absent from the body " practically means to be present with the Lord. There is no conscious break to the person who undergoes the absence. It is an instantaneous change of condition. I have been thinking much upon that point this last week. I have thought a chart might be drawn, which would very vividly bring that before the mind's eye—that as we are unconscious of death, there is no such thing in relation to us, individually, as death, because we shall be unaware of death happening ; it will be all gone by before we know it has happened. Now, because that is the case, we have to look at the thing in this practical way—that Christ is standing at the end of our little career, as it were ; that as we reach the end of that career, we shall seem to stand in his presence. In that sense, he is not far off. He is waiting at the end of our journey to receive us. Although, actually, the reception does not take place until he comes ; and although, actually, none of us will be glorified until all are, yet, in relation to each individual consciousness, it will appear to be instantaneously occurrent when we close our eyes in death, because, as unconscious of death as of sleep, and more so, we shall appear at once to stand face to face with the Lord. Consequently, if we are to die a week hence, practically the coming of the Lord is only a week away from us.

It seems to me there is great comfort in that thought. In fact, it just gives the consolation which orthodox believers take, and which they think we lack ; but which we do not lack at all. To contemplate the gap of time that may actually divide any generation from the coming of Jesus, may give us the idea of its being a very long period ; but it may be answered, that when we are dead, we shall know nothing about that gap at all, and, therefore, the Lord is near, in that sense, to every one of us. In our century, we know that in another sense he is very near. We are just in the position that Christ indicated to his disciples, when he said they were to watch lest they might be taken unawares ; and we are watching for his speedy appearing, for although we know not the day nor the hour, we have been given to know the dispensation by the light which God has vouchsafed by Daniel and John. Beyond the general knowledge of the time of the end, we know not the hour of his appearance. We do not know in what part of the latter-day programme it is intended he shall reveal himself to his servants. It is well to see that whatever may occur in this respect, to us as individuals, he is at the door. This is a thought which has great power in giving the truth a reality it may fail to have if we are all the time poisoning ourselves in relation to great periods. It enables us to surrender ourselves

SEASONS OF COMFORT

more entirely to our espousals. We are called to be espoused to Christ. Paul said to the Corinthians that he had espoused them as a chaste virgin to Christ ; they were betrothed, and that is our position ; that is to say, we are entirely his. We do not possess the liberty the world claims, and which some mistaken servants claim. Our position is that which Paul defines—"Henceforth know we no man after the flesh."

When a man puts on the Lord Jesus in obedience to the truth, he assumes a new position, and his relations to things around him are altogether different to what they are in Nature. He sees things in quite a different light ; he is not of the flesh, and recognizes no scheme as having a claim upon his sympathy that merely has to do with the present evil world. His hope is to be delivered from this present evil world. Christ has given himself that this deliverance may be accomplished. Our position, meanwhile, is that of denying ourselves ungodliness and worldly lusts, and looking for the blessed hope of his coming again. We are not our own. As Paul says (2 Cor. 5 : 14), "The love of Christ constraineth us ; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead : and that he died for all, that they who live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him who died for them, and rose again." The argument of that is very simple. Paul says that if one died for all, representatively, then all died in him : so that we should reckon ourselves dead and buried, so far as this life's relationships go. We are not, as Peter says, to live the rest of our time in the flesh, to fulfil the lusts of the flesh, but to do the will of him who lived and died for us. That seems exceedingly reasonable, and we shall certainly find out on that day, when the Lord stands upon the earth again, and masses before him all his people, that none will be selected for companionship in his glory but those who have answered to this description—who have lived for him, who have been faithful stewards of their trust. None doubt this theoretically. The great matter is to get believers to recognize the fact practically. I presume that these first-day meetings were instituted by Christ for the very purpose of enabling us to realize these great things. If we did realize them, we should be more practical and earnest in our position as the Lord's servants.

Just imagine the Lord Jesus in the earth again, and ourselves summoned to meet him. What would be the great anxiety on the part of every one of us ? Only one. All the anxieties of a lifetime would take flight, except one : "What does he think of us ?" That will be the engrossing concern of the moment. Now, what is it that determines Christ's opinion of us ? Is it the state of mind that will be produced by the occurrence of his advent ? No ; for then everybody will be in a state of readiest loyalty ; everybody will then see that Christ is really the only important calculation of life ; and, of course, they will be prepared with all manner of protestations and professions, with tears, how much they desire him. These will not move Christ. That which determines his opinion is what we are doing *now*. He has made known the principle of his judgment : "I will give to every one of you *according as your work shall be*." Therefore, *now* is the time of action. Let every man look to what he is doing—and every woman. Let them remember that their present daily life—dull, uninteresting, unimportant though it may appear, is really pregnant with their destiny. All depends upon how they turn the present time to account. Future position

will be determined entirely by present deportment ; the important thing is to be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. And how can we be in this state if we neglect the means whereby we may attain to it—the reading of the Word, and the assembling of ourselves together ? We ought not to trust to second-hand information in this important matter. Speeches we may listen to and articles we may read are liable to be greatly diluted and corrupted by human thought. We are apt to be misled by this one's opinion and that one's opinion as to what we should do. When we consider that in that day, with which any individual may be face to face immediately, human opinions and human professions will disappear like mist in the divine presence, we can see how true it is that the only wisdom, at present, in the midst of all our toils and labour is to adhere to the Word of God, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. What will Christ care as to a man's " position " in the estimation of fellow-men ? He has told us that that which is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God. He looks not at a man's " position." We must remember that Christ is the embodiment of the great Power that said by Isaiah, " My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." We shall be judged by the simple standard, " Have you done what I commanded you ? " That will be the one simple question ; indeed, it is the very simplicity of it that seems to turn people away from it. " Have you done what I commanded ? " We all know what we are doing, and we shall be able to give a right account, either for good or evil. Well, whatever we may say about ourselves, he will make manifest what we are, and our anxiety should be, while the Lord delays, to get on the right side of the account.

All his commandments have to do with practical daily life. Hence, next to a knowledge of the truth, the practical management of daily life is the main question. There is a reason for laying continual stress on this : having had to struggle out of darkness, we have had our minds drawn very much into polemical channels. We have been much occupied in getting to know what truth is, consequently we are liable to stop short at our attainment of this, whereas we have done but a small thing. We are, as it were, in no more forward a position than the crowds that listened to Christ. They heard what he had to say ; they knew what the truth was, but that merely opened the door for their salvation. Obedience was the difficulty. The knowledge of the truth only opens the door. We cannot be saved before that. There is no hope for us at all apart from the Gospel ; but the Gospel only gives us the start. It all depends how we walk after that. What ought the assembly of Christ to be but a representation, on a small scale, of what is to be made politically dominant when Christ comes, and when God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven ? We are called unto that kingdom, and, therefore, as an assembly of those who are called unto the kingdom, we ought to exemplify those characteristics that will appertain to it in the day of its manifestation. All the purity of individual thought and action which will prevail then in the world ; all rejoicing in the truth, and making our boast in God that will then be the universal law ; all that loving of men and serving of God that will prevail, ought to be incipiently visible in our assembly. We ought to be the kingdom of God in miniature ; in fact, all the saints are : there is no doubt about that, though there may

be a doubt as to who are the saints. Therefore, let us walk in the light of the word. Do not heed what is said on the right hand or on the left. Avail yourself of good company, if you can get it, but take care you do not get injured where you expected to be benefited. Remember that most of those by whom you are surrounded have but recently emerged from the world with all its ignorance, disobedience, stupidity, and carnality, and that you are not to be despondent and lose heart because other people may not exemplify the truth. If others do not, you try, at least; save yourself from this untoward generation. It is just as untoward as the generation of Peter, and it is only by the means offered by Peter, in the name of Christ, that we have any hope at all.

Receiving the Grace of God in Vain

The grace of God.—Popular theology VERSUS apostolic “grace.”—Israel’s history illustrative of the latter.—Receiving the grace of God in vain.—Unfruitfulness of character.—The parable of the barren fig tree.—The double objects of the gospel.—Not merely that men may be saved, but that the Father may find pleasure in our love.—The fruit of the Spirit.—A Spirit-induced state of mind finds expression in action.—Unfruitfulness and coming consequences.—The law of fruitfulness.—Soil and culture.—Reading, prayer and assembling.—Growth slow but sure.

2 CORINTHIANS 6.—The first verse of the chapter read this morning contains, in a sentence, the pith of all apostolic exhortation, “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.” This apostolic entreaty suggests several profitable thoughts. It distinctly implies that the grace of God is given for a purpose that may not be realized in all who are the subjects of it. This cuts at the root of popular conceptions of “grace”; according to which, grace is a spiritual essence stealing over the senses, as it were, and influencing the faculties of the mind, and working its own work apart from the will of the subject. This is a sort of grace that would be impossible to “receive in vain”; for once received, the effect is as sure as sleep follows chloroform. The “grace” of apostolic language is a grace that may be received in vain. This grace is neither more nor less than favour of God, manifested in benefits conferred and offered, with the object of evoking in us certain results towards Him which He desires. It is easy to understand this sort of grace being received in vain. Israel, in all stages of their history, exemplifies it. The generation that came out of Egypt, received God’s grace or favour in vain. His power was thrown away upon them. They proved ungrateful, unappreciative, disobedient. They did not yield that reasonable response of love and service which it was calculated and designed to evoke; and they perished in consequence. Paul makes a special application of this to believers. He lays stress on the fact that “all our fathers were under the cloud, and baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.” They were all constitutionally introduced to God’s favour; but so far as their individual benefit was concerned, it was in vain. “They

fell in the wilderness," whereupon he makes the remark : " *Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted*" (1 Cor. 10 : 6).

Now, the grace or favour of God has come to us in the forgiveness of our past sins, and the promise of eternal life and inheritance in His glorious kingdom ; and Paul's entreaty to the Corinthians, and, therefore, to us, who have been brought into their position, is, that we receive not this grace in vain. Let us seek to realize what it is to receive it in vain, that we may be enabled to avoid so hapless a condition. We can best do this by considering what its reception is intended to accomplish. It is intended to induce certain results in which the Father takes pleasure, and in the development of which He finds recompense as it were for His goodness. These results are, by a figure, styled "fruit." Jesus says, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." Barrenness of the fruit referred to is displeasing to Him. Paul's employment of the figure is in this striking form, that the earth which bringeth forth herbs for them by whom it is dressed receiveth blessing, but that which beareth thorns and briars is *rejected*, and is nigh unto cursing (Heb. 6 : 8). This is the idea of the parable of the fig tree (Luke 13 : 6), to which the owner came for three years in succession, "seeking fruit and finding none." "Cut it down," saith he ; "why cumbereth it the ground?" The occasion of this parable makes its individual application unmistakable. Some had been telling Jesus of the accident at Siloam, by which eighteen persons had been killed by the falling of a tower, and of the cruel butchery of certain Galileans by Pilate ; with the suggestion evidently intended that the victims of these calamities must have been extra wicked ; after the mode of argument employed by Job's friends. Christ says, "Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things ? I tell you, Nay : but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." Then comes the parable of the fig tree, teaching them that their exemption from death was due to the divine forbearance, and not to their excellence. This was the doctrine of John the Baptist, who told them that the axe was laid at the root of the tree, and that every tree that brought not forth good fruit would be hewn down and cast into the fire : which happened with unsparing severity in the days of vengeance that soon afterwards descended on the Jewish commonwealth.

The application of the same principle to us, calls upon us to consider some of the lessons suggested by the figure. A fruit tree exists in itself but not for itself. A fulfilment of the objects of its existence requires that it bring forth something for the use and gratification of its owner. This is completely applicable to those whom Paul exhorts to receive not the grace of God in vain. Salvation has come nigh to them, not merely that they may be personally delivered from evil ; but that they may be "to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made them accepted in the beloved." If our appreciation of the Gospel rises no higher than the comfort of being saved, we receive the grace of God in vain. Our hearts must be filled with an appreciation of the greatness, and goodness, and worthiness, and unspeakable excellence of Him by whom all things have been made. The first feature of a true son is that he knows, loves, and glories in his father. The love of his father's property would not be accepted as an equivalent for personal love. Our love of eternal life and the kingdom of God will not

SEASONS OF COMFORT

stand instead of the "loving of the Lord our God with all our hearts," which is, "the first and great commandment."

The fruit that is acceptable to the great owner of the vineyard is styled "the fruit of the Spirit." This is because it comes from the seed contained in the teaching of the Spirit. No other fruit is acceptable. Actions and conditions that spring from any other source than the mind of the Spirit expressed in the word, are like the strange fire offered by Nadab and Abihu. The commands of the Spirit obeyed, the likeness of the Spirit taken on, will cause the Father to find pleasure in us. "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

The fruits of the Spirit are thus defined by Paul: "Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." With this state of mind, as induced by the teaching of the Spirit, God is well pleased, as a man is pleased with ripe apples from his orchard. But this state of mind must, of course, find expression in action. Faith without works is dead, being alone. While, therefore, our hearts are established with grace, "let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name; but to do good and communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13: 9, 15, 16). Peter tells us that the offering up of spiritual sacrifices is "acceptable to God by Christ Jesus" (1 Pet. 2: 5). Paul thus alludes to the ministrations of the Philippians to his need: "Ye have done well that ye did communicate with my affliction . . . not because I desire a gift, but I desire *fruit that may abound to your account . . . an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God*" (Phil. 4: 14-18).

The nature of fruit-bearing in practical life is therefore evident. To receive the grace of God in vain, is to be destitute of this fruit; it is to know the Gospel without being so influenced by it as to yield to it the results it contemplates in the renovation of the heart, the purification of the affections, the reformation of the life, the opening of the generous impulses towards men, and the fountain of gratitude and adoration towards God; and the abandonment and crucifixion of all that is contrary to the mind of Christ. Where this is the unfortunate state of things: where the heart is still set on earthly things; and the sympathies are yet undrawn out towards the things of Christ; where sin is yet followed and God still distant; where holiness is unknown, and self-denial not understood, nothing waits but a "fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversary." The "unprofitable servant" is to be cast out. The servant who can show nothing done for the name of Christ: nothing ministered to the wants of the saints: nothing beyond a life spent at the shrine of self-interest and self-gratification—has little to look for in the day of reckoning. Even those who do their duty are sensible of the inadequacy of their claim upon divine approbation; having done all, they say, "We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do," even as Christ enjoins (Luke 17: 10). If this is the case with them, where shall the faithless and unholy appear?

Now, let us consider for a moment the laws that govern fruitfulness. They are very much the same in the substance as in the figure. In the natural, there must be soil; so in the spiritual, and this is sometimes deep and rich, and sometimes meagre. For the character of the soil, we shall not

be called to account. If we are only equal to a crop of thirtyfold, we shall not be held accountable to the measure of an hundredfold. God is just. We shall be judged with reference to what is possible with us. This is where our whole care should be bestowed. We may have good soil, producing weeds for want of culture. Poor soil will improve under training. So much for the soil. But we are likened to fruit trees. Now, fruit trees would neither yield fruit nor grow if left unwatered either by the hand of man or the rain of heaven. Sunshine and moisture are necessary to their development. It is no less so with the spiritual : trees neglected will run to waste. They must be watered in season by the word, kept free from the insect blight by prayer, and invigorated by the fresh air and sunshine of brotherly intercourse as appointed. The reading of the word stands first in the process of spiritual horticulture. We are told to "desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby." Apart from the word there will be no growth. We shall soon absorb what little moisture we have in ourselves, we shall soon wither and decay. "Let my word abide in you." This is Christ's prescription for continuing healthy branches of the vine. Then "let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." The neglect of this item of husbandry will enfeeble the spiritual plant.

A fact to be profitably noted is that growth, though certain under right conditions, is slow and imperceptible. You cannot see a tree grow while you stand and look at it, nor during many visits. Would a gardener be wise in stopping the cultivation because of this? After a long time, you see the great progress made. This progress would not have been realized, if the daily process had been interrupted. So in the spiritual, you may not be conscious of any advance in a week or a month, but persevere. If you only take care to keep yourself subject to the fertilizing influences of spiritual horticulture, you ensure progress, which by and by will begin to be visible to your own consciousness. You will find yourself changing in a spiritual direction. In the course of years you will become a different person from what you would be if the natural mind were left to itself. The direction of the vessel determines the course of the voyage. Her progress may be slow, but if she is always going one way, she will be a long way on at last. The present *drift* is the thing to watch.

These things have to be considered by wise men, and applied in the great undertaking which the Gospel puts in their hands. Vigilance and perseverance will be rewarded in the day when "the wise shall inherit glory, but shame shall be the promotion of fools."

The Day of the Lord

The coming of the Lord as a thief.—The peace and safety cry.—No peace to the wicked.—War appointed for the world in its present state.—The day of the Lord.—Its coming to the saints not as a thief.—Children of light and the day, but not all.—Lukewarmness.—Danger of self-congratulation.—Christadelphian boastfulness rank abomination.—Wretched and miserable without knowing it.—Strange but possible state.—Christ's prescribed remedy.—The Spirit's invitation.—The origin of faith.—Hearing, and in our day, reading.—Reading must be regular and diligent.—The night and the coming day.—The children of the day must not sleep.—What sleep is.—What will keep us awake.—What cannot keep us awake.—Wisdom of daily reading the Word.—Its neglect practical insanity.—The struggle of life.—Apart from the truth.—Vanity.

1 THESSALONIANS 5.—Paul had been speaking on the subject of the coming of the Lord as the comfort of believers with regard to those who were dead. He here says it was unnecessary for him to write them on the subject of the times and seasons. For this he gives two reasons: "Yourselves *know perfectly* that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." How did they know? By Paul's teaching: for we find him, in the next epistle (2 Thess. 2 : 5) saying, "When I was with you, I told you these things." What did they know? That the day would come unexpectedly—"as a thief." Upon the believers? No. Upon those who should cry, "Peace and safety," when destruction should be at the door. This is not the case with believers. They know that there is no "peace and safety" for the world until the Prince of Peace is enthroned on Zion's Hill. "In his days the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth" (Psa. 72 : 7). "In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely" (Jer. 23 : 6). There is no peace to the world under its present constitution of wickedness. And especially at "the end" is there no peace to be looked for, but nations angry, and a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation upon earth to that same time (Dan. 12 : 1). But all the time and at the last will be found such (and these very numerous) as cry, Peace and safety. The world has been sounding this cry during all its troublous and blood-stained history. After every war, there is to be everlasting peace; and every war is a "guarantee" of the general repose. Notably is this the case in our own day, when the world is armed to the teeth, as it never was before, and trembling in the uncertain balance of peace or war. Notwithstanding the most unpromising situation of things, every potentate, statesman, diplomatist, politician, and newspaper writer talks complacently of peace as a thing to be secured. "Peace" has been on their lips while war is in their hearts, and the heedless throng, anxious only about business, have caught up the strain. The saints are not of those who cry, Peace and safety, except to such as fear God and keep His commandments. For all the rest of mankind war is appointed, especially the war of the great day of God Almighty, which, at the coming of the Lord, is destined to sweep away all refuges of lies, and lay the foundation for a reign of righteousness and everlasting peace.

The day of the Lord will not come upon the saints as a thief. As a snare it will come upon all men that dwell upon the whole earth (Luke 21 : 35), but upon the called, and chosen, and faithful, it will come as the welcome deliverance which a lifetime's expectation and preparation will have made them ready to receive with gladness. Seeing the appointed tokens among the nations, they lift up their heads, knowing that their redemption draweth nigh.

But there was another reason why the day of the Lord could not come upon the Thessalonians as a thief, and as we are in their position, we do well to consider it. They were not in darkness, that that day should overtake them as a thief. *They were all the children of light and of the day.* Come soon or come late, it could not find them unprepared, but ready to rise in joy in response to the uprising of the Sun of Righteousness. Paul did not mean to say that absolutely every individual of the Thessalonian ecclesia was in this position ; for you find him mentioning some who were otherwise conditioned. " I hear," he says, " that there are some which walk among you disorderly " ; and he thought it necessary to direct the ecclesia to withdraw from all who did not submit to his word (2 Thess. 3 : 6). An ecclesia by position and profession belongs to the light of the day. That is the description of the high calling which has called it into existence ; but it does not follow that all its members come up to the profession. It is possible that many of them may come short of the stature of the new man in Christ, and consequently fail in obtaining the promise. It is even possible that in a whole ecclesia there may not be a single individual acceptable in the sight of God. We seem to discover such a case in the messages of Christ to the seven ecclesias that were in Asia. To all, with two exceptions, he speaks of the bulk of their members in doubtful terms. Of one, he speaks as if it lacked a single individual of the true type ; which affords matter for serious reflection for us who, living so long after the authoritative proclamation of the word, are in much more danger of being in that position.

To Laodicea he says, " I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot ; I would thou wert cold or hot." Some wonder why Jesus should wish anyone to be cold. We find the explanation in the fact that, as a matter of temperature, cold or heat are acceptable in food, while a middle state is unpleasing. As cold water to thirst, or warm food to the hungry, so should the saints be to Christ. In some form or other, they should minister to his pleasure. He should find satisfaction in their love and obedience and zeal in one shape if not in another. We should afford him joy by our walk somehow. Lukewarmness is sickening. This is the state of professors who yield him no pleasure. In this state, they are in danger of being spued out of his mouth. This was the disaster impending over Laodicea. The reason is in these words : " Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." This shows the possibility of a community thinking well of itself, but being wretched before the Lord. Jesus says that many on that day will say to him, " Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name, and in thy name done many wonderful works ? " But he will profess unto them : " I never knew you." " Not every one," he adds, " that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in

SEASONS OF COMFORT

heaven." Self-congratulation is a dangerous luxury on the part of either individuals or communities. Be thankful for privileges and attainments, but make no boast. Enjoy the goodness of God in meekness ; flourish it not in the eyes of neighbours as a matter of superiority ; for what have we that we have not received ; and it may be that we have not received so much as we think. Let us take care that we deceive not ourselves. The boast of Christadelphian superiority to the sects is rank abomination in the sight of God, if we are reprobate to His commandments. It is good to know the truth, and to stand in Christ Jesus ; but let us beware of saying, " We are rich and increased in goods, and have need of nothing," lest we are in the position of the Laodiceans who, without being aware of it, " were wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked."

It may seem strange that anybody should be wretched and miserable without knowing it. But when we understand these terms to refer to one's actual relation to good and evil, and not to our feelings for the time being, the matter is clear. A man making merry on board a ship that is shortly to drown him in the depths of the sea, is more wretched than a man cast away on a desert island, from which he is about to be rescued, and to be conducted to great comfort and plenty. So in Christ, those people are truly wretched and miserable who, though on very good terms with themselves, are objects of detestation in the eyes of the Lord ; while those whom he regards with approval are truly blessed, though they may be in fear and bitterness, and have much acquaintance with grief and suffering. The former class have much need to listen when Christ counsels them " to buy of him gold tried in the fire that they may be rich " ; that is, faith that stands the trial of grievous circumstances—a faith more precious than gold that perisheth though it be tried in the fire, showing itself in untiring obedience to the commandments amid all the seductions or discouragements of this mortal state. " White raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear " ; that is, the righteousness that comes from the forgiveness of our sins and fruitfulness in the Spirit. " Anoint thine eyes with eyesalve that thou mayest see " ; that is, to correct the mental perceptions in such a way as to see all things in the light in which Christ regards them.

Jesus invites the shortcomers to purchase these things of him. It is the same voice that we hear in Isaiah—the Spirit of Christ in the prophet : " Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money ; come ye, buy, and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread ? and your labour for that which satisfieth not ? Hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me ; hear, and your soul shall live " (Isa. 55 : 1-3). The same gracious words we hear from the mouth of Christ himself : " I will give to him that is athirst of the water of life freely." " Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." " Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." " The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely."

Let us strive to realize what these beautiful metaphors mean, as regards our acceptance of the invitation. In what way are we to buy of Christ the things he commends to the Laodiceans? We shall see this if we consider what they are. Gold tried in the fire, or a tried faith. How cometh this? "Faith," we are told, "*cometh by hearing*" (Rom. 10 : 17). By hearing what? By hearing the Spirit; as saith Jesus: "He that hath an ear, let him HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT SAITH to the ecclesias." What that Spirit has said, in all the holy men by whom it has spoken, and, lastly, by the Lord himself, *has been written*. Consequently, in its literal application to us, the blessing is connected with READING. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written *for our learning*, that we through *patience and comfort of the scriptures* might have hope" (Rom. 15 : 4). Let us, then, in obedience to the invitation of the Spirit, *read what has been written* that we may acquire that faith which cometh by hearing, and which, in its exercise, is likened to gold tried in the fire. This reading to be effective must be constant. It must be all the days of our life (Deut. 17 : 19 ; 4 : 10). We must give earnest heed to the *things we have heard*, lest at any time we let them slip (Heb. 2 : 1) ; giving *all diligence* to make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1 : 10). We must honour God by listening every day to His voice which speaks to us in His word. Thus shall we obtain the mind of the Spirit. Thus shall faith grow strong within us, ready for the trial which shall not destroy it, but purify it as gold. Thus shall we pray effectively before Him that we may be assisted in time of need. This figurative exhortation to buy gold tried in the fire, resolves itself into an exhortation to read the word ; to watch daily at wisdom's gates, waiting at the posts of her doors, that finding her, we may find life and obtain favour of the Lord (Prov. 8 : 34).

The same line of thought will be traversed in the consideration of the other items. "White raiment," or a state of acceptance before Him by righteousness, is only to be attained by allowing the Word of Christ so to operate continually on the inner man that we become like-minded with himself, and obtain the forgiveness of all our sins, and become energized to the performance of righteousness as by a second nature, even the new man renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him. Eye-salve is obtained in like manner, enabling us to see all things in their true light, and to act the part of wise men accordingly.

These things are characteristic of all who are truly the children of light and of the day. These things belong to the day. The present time is night in relation to the world at large. The earth's population, in all its teeming millions, walks in darkness. The world lieth in wickedness. Folly reigns. Wisdom is scarcely to be found. The fear of God is nearly unknown. The mass, even in "civilization," are but brutish untutored barbarians, uninfluenced by the higher laws of intelligent being, and governed only by the animal instincts of eating, drinking, clothing, and herding together. We shall see how intense has been the night we are coming through, when we get into the full blaze of the glorious day. We shall realize it more powerfully than we do now with our comparatively blunted perceptions.

We are not of the night if we are Christ's. We are of the day. We belong to the day of Christ : to the good time coming when righteousness shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. We have now to realize

SEASONS OF COMFORT

the principles of that glorious era in present and complete submission to them. "Let us not sleep as do others," so Paul exhorts, "but let us watch and be sober." He does not mean literal sleep, for literally, we *are* to sleep as do others; for if we did not sleep, we should die, and the work of God be frustrated. We are not to sleep in the sense in which the world is asleep. We are not to share their state of unconsciousness with regard to the great realities of existence, and spend our time in illusory dreams. The world is unconscious of God; it is unconscious of His universal presence and power; it is unconscious of Christ, and of God's purpose with Him; it is unconscious of the great claim He has on every living soul; it is unconscious of the great plan He is working out, and of the principles which He desires His creatures to recognize. It is dreaming of life, and comfort, and prosperity without God; the phantasm of a disordered brain. With this state of mind, the saint has nothing in common; but if he be not on his guard, he may sink into it. How are we to preserve our consciousness of all the great things that pertain to the "day"? How shall we avoid sleeping "as do others"? By giving heed to what the Spirit saith; and the Spirit speaketh in the word. By this companionship with God we are kept in remembrance of the great facts upon which the realities of life are founded. We are preserved in remembrance of *Him*, having the fear of Him before our eyes all the day long. We are enabled to have continually in view those stars of our history—the death, burial, and resurrection of our compassionate Lord and Master, who now lives a Priest for those who hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope steadfast to the end. We are kept in a state of continual acquaintance with the things God would have us do and think, and with which He is well pleased. We are kept in constant recollection of the great purpose for which the Son of God has appeared, and that the heavens must hold him only till the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.

If we forget these things, we "sleep as do others," and drift along the stream of death, concerned only, like the Gentiles around us, with the questions, "What shall we eat? what shall we drink? and wherewith shall we be clothed?" This is to be prevented by the continued reception of the Spirit that will keep us awake. We cannot keep awake in our day in any other way. We are not reminded of these things by the aspects of Nature presented to us as we walk abroad. The blue sky, the shining sun, the gentle breeze, the murmuring waves, the waving cornfields, the singing birds, or the thronging streets of a great city, are powerless to enlighten us on the great things of the Spirit. These things are based on history and promises, and Nature is as silent on these as on the exploits of Bismarck. We can learn them only where God has chosen to deposit the instructions. We can learn them in His word, and in His word only. Business is a continual weariness of buying and selling and getting gain, useful in its way, but a deadly fever if it monopolize the mind. Jesus gives us a correct estimate of it in telling us there are those who, when they hear the word, "go forth, and the care of this world, and the lusts of other things entering in, *choke the word*, and it becometh unfruitful."

The wisdom of daily reading becomes more and more apparent. This lesson cannot be too strongly enforced, or too distinctly apprehended among

those who have fled to lay hold of the refuge set before them in the Gospel. Their life depends upon it. They are in danger of being blinded to it. Away from it, we are open to a hundred plausible deceptions which lay hold with a death-grip all the more fatal because soft and sweet. Spiritual decay potently prevails where the reading of the word is neglected. A lamentable mistake is made by those who conclude they have no time to read. What should we say of persons concluding they had no time to take their food? No more insane would this be than the other hallucination in its ultimate effect. Man lives not by bread alone. He may live an animal life by bread alone: but animal life is a brief affair. There comes a life afterwards that springs from the word now stored into the heart; and deceived is the individual who excludes the Word of God from his daily consumption on the plea that he has "no time." What is he so busy about? What should we say of a man in the cabin of a sinking ship, who should neglect preparations for the lifeboat on the plea that affairs in the cabin left him no time? This is a dying life—dying, dying, dying; and slaves of death are those who allow its transient concerns so to fill their heads and hearts as to shut out the "one thing needful." A wise man will not be found perishing so. He will not be cheated on any pretext, out of that bread which shall be unto him "life everlasting." If he is ever so poor, or ever so close-worked, he will find twenty minutes a day, at least, to sit at the shrine of God, and be taught by the voice that speaks to him as from over the mercy-seat of the ancient tabernacle of the testimony. And if rich, he will smite the golden beast with the rod of his authority, and order it to be in the corner for a time every day, while he listens to the Maker and Possessor of heaven and earth. The man—poor or rich—who acts not thus, is a fool; for what does the struggle of life amount to, apart from the attainment of that good which shall not be taken away? To a complete vanity. The poor man sweats out his three-score and ten, and lies down to be no more remembered. The rich man, by much contrivance, draws the coin from his neighbour's pockets, and, having scraped much to his corner, comes to his weary end, closes his eyes in disappointment, and dies like the fool with his barns, with a fearful awakening in store, when God, whom he has cheated, will mete out his portion of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversary.

Let us, in these days, be wise; and we shall at last see the glorious harvest in joy unspeakable, in the ranks of the blessed company who shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.

Light and Darkness

Need for the weekly breaking of bread.—No light within.—When put in it must be fed continually.—Present impressions misleading.—Wisdom utters a disagreeable “Don’t.”—Natural man prefers no restraint.—Bible neglected.—Pleasures of the present world.—Nemesis of the Word.—That which is wise to be done.—That which is written.—The world a passing but deceptive affair.—Feeling contrary to knowledge.—A dangerous spiritual glamour.—The devil of experience.—The way he is to be combated.—The philosophy of spiritual strength.—Heavy weights sinking a man elegantly to perdition.—One thing needful.—Several “musts.”—Evanescence of the present life.—The lessons of history.—Life’s rugged hill, the vain toil and quiet grave.—The prayers of the righteous and their answer.

WE much need this weekly reminder of Christ. Increasing experience will show every thoughtful mind the entire wisdom of the appointment by which Christ has made it a matter of duty to break bread each first day of the week in remembrance of him. Without it, we should drift into forgetfulness and death. The appointment was founded upon a knowledge of what man is and how he is affected by his surroundings. In this it differs from human institutions. Human appointments are liable to be founded on false theories, and, therefore, to work mischief instead of benefit. It is a false theory that we have “light within”; it is a false theory that we have intrinsic memory of divine things; it is a false theory that knowledge once introduced into the mind is a permanent fixture there; and any line of action based upon these assumptions is certain to lead away from the path of life. Most men are more or less influenced by a false theory of this sort, and the effect is seen in the neglect of Bible reading, the neglect of meetings, the neglect of “the ordinances,” as delivered by Paul at the command of Christ; and the effect of this neglect is spiritual death.

The Bible representation of human nature is found experimentally to be true—that man is dark left to his native resources; that there is no good in him by nature; that light comes from without; that there is no light but Christ; that this light, by the Gospel, heard, understood, believed and obeyed, shines into the inner man, and constitutes the recipients children of light; yet that the reception of this light does not save him unless it remains with him; that there is danger of its not remaining; that man is weak; that he is liable to “let slip” the “things which he has heard”; that he is in danger of being hardened through the *deceitfulness* of sin, and departing from the living God; drawing back into perdition, after having run well for a while. Nothing is more plainly revealed than that it is he who endureth to the end that is to be saved; that it is they who hold fast the beginning of their confidence and rejoicing of the hope, steadfast unto the end, that are to be made partakers of Christ; that the man not keeping in memory the Gospel, not remaining grounded and settled, but being moved away from the hope of the Gospel, will fail in entering into the kingdom of God.

These testimonies (for all these things are testified: Matt. 24:13; Heb. 3:6, 14; 1 Cor. 15:2; Col. 1:23; Heb. 2:3; 3:13) point to a danger to which it is very easy to become oblivious. The human mind

easily gives in to present facts, or rather, the impression they make, and these impressions are generally in the contrary direction to wisdom and well-being. Youth would eat unwholesome things and walk in hurtful ways, because they are pleasant for the time being, and do not, in their first impressions, show him the mischief. Knowledge, parentally enforced where there is wisdom, steps in and says, "Don't." The child either has loving confidence in the restriction, and submits willingly to the disagreeable denial, to find out afterwards the sweetness of wisdom; or dislikes the "Don't," and yields only to compulsion, but afterwards to discover the same lesson. Youth grown up, *i.e.*, men and women, old and young, shows the same tendency to be led by the appearance of things, but lacks, in the absence of the kingdom of God, the guidance which is the privilege of some children. In most things, they judge by proximate sensations, and consequently go astray. It is pleasant to be free from restraint, and therefore, they go, "every one to his own way," to find at last that the pleasant ways of the natural man incline to darkness and death. It is irksome to watch daily at the gates of wisdom, waiting at the posts of her door; therefore, wisdom is made to lie on the library shelf, or under the table, or behind the door, or in the yard outside—anywhere—to wait the convenience of the man who prefers to find engagement in attending to the wants and pleasures, business and concerns, of the present animal existence; which, being interpreted, means that the Bible, which is to us the voice of Eternal Wisdom, is by some attended to in an only occasional and indifferent way, instead of being read and studied daily; and this because other things are sweeter to the taste or esteemed more important to be attended to. The result is that a man, at last, when he has lost the zest of human enjoyments—nay, when perhaps the possession of them is gone for ever—finds himself barren of that most precious of all treasures, to find which is to find life, the favour of the Lord and riches for evermore; but to find which requires, in the divine arrangements, that it be sought after with all the industry and energy implied in the figure of digging as for hid treasure. It is pleasant to have the smile and countenance of neighbours; it is pleasant to have plenty in hand; it is pleasant to have the friendship and honour of the world; and, therefore, men are liable to be insensibly governed by these things in the ordering of their lives, and to yield but a cold response to the demands of wisdom—demands which, in many cases, are inconsistent with these pleasures, and mortifying to the natural man in general. The result of listening to these seductions will certainly be shame and death. This is revealed; and though men in prosperity may disregard the still small voice of wisdom, they will be compelled to listen at another time, when their surroundings will be those of desolation and consternation. Profane talkers speak of the Nemesis that follows in the wake of human action. There is no Nemesis like the Word of God, spoken now in quietness and love. It will yet rend the foundation of wickedness with destructive earthquake. It will subvert all the kingdoms of the world with a violence before which fleets and armies will be as nothing, and which will cause even the children of pride to lament with a pitiful wail when they see their houses in ruins before the hurricane of divine vengeance.

Not that which is pleasant to be done, but that which is wise to be done, will be the motto of every true member of the house of Christ. And that

SEASONS OF COMFORT

which is wise to be done is that which God has commanded ; because obedience to His commandments only, will bring honour and life at the last. And what He has commanded is that which is written in the Scriptures of truth. Our anxiety, therefore, is to know, and remember, and hold fast, and honour, and constantly meditate upon, and do the things that are written therein. There is no other path of wisdom but this. In any other way vanity is the vexatious accompaniment, and death the end of the journey.

The world passeth away and the fashion thereof. This is a fact which everyone will admit ; but how many allow to the fact its practical effect in their lives ? Most men are under the power of illusion contrary to their perceptions on this subject. They know that human existence is a transient affair ; they know that Christ has already appeared in the earth, and laid the foundation of the only concern of lasting consequence among men ; and that in the purpose of God, Christ will, in due course, appear again and judge every man's work in the light of what he has required of them by the hands of his apostles. They know all this, and yet their feelings are contrary to their knowledge. They feel as if human life were not transient, but as if they had always been, and as if they would always exist. They feel as if Christ were merely a matter of history and dispute, and his future coming an ideal theme for poesy. Consequently they are liable to be swayed by that which seems the only reality : the maxims of men and the exigencies of the present evil world. This is a dangerous spiritual glamour, to be thrown off with the utmost determination. It is the power of the devil upon us—not the mythical devil of orthodox phrase, but the dangerous devil of actual experience, the devil that lurks in every man's bosom—the devil of natural stupidity, which is pouring endless lies into the ear—the devil of ignorance and carnal affinity which binds in strong delusion the masses of mankind, and who can only be kept at bay in the children of light by unceasing vigilance in the warfare to which they have been called.

What literally is the mode of warfare to be adopted in the contest with this dangerous foe ? Paul indicates it in saying to the Ephesian elders, "I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and give you an inheritance among all them who are sanctified" (Acts 20 : 32). Also Jesus, in his prayer, "Sanctify them through thy truth" (John 17 : 17). What is the essence of the idea here but this, that the false impression of the senses is to be combated by the implantation of knowledge which is beyond the reach of the senses ? Christ is not within reach of the senses, because he is absent from the earth. If we trusted to our senses, we should believe that he was nothing—past, present, or to come. God's communications with Israel and His deeds on their behalf are beyond reach of the senses, because we live not in the day of their occurrence, but in the interregnum of the divine work on earth. If we listened to our senses, we should never know that such communications had occurred, and consequently should be influenced by the supposition that there never had been and never could be any work of God on the earth beyond what we see in the natural ordinances of creation. Our senses would tell us lies on these and many other particulars ; and thus our natural selves are to ourselves the devil, whose impositions and temptations are to be continually resisted by the weapon of knowledge provided in the

word. This applied to the mind creates, and constantly applied, maintains, the right impression with regard to all these things ; and this right impression, sedulously cultivated and obeyed, gives us the victory : for what is the victory that overcometh the world ? Even our faith (1 John 5 : 4) ; and what is faith ? “ The confidence of things *hoped for*, the conviction of things *not seen* ” (Heb. 11 : 1). And how cometh this faith ? “ Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God ” (Rom. 10 : 17) ; and the Word of God was spoken by the Spirit (2 Pet. 1 : 20, 21).

Here is what you may call the philosophy of spiritual strength. It is here where the vital importance of the Bible and all the institutions connected with it is to be seen, and the importance also of avoiding all things, however “ lawful ” in themselves, which being calculated to foster the false impressions of life, or to interfere with the nurture of the true, are most inexpedient and dangerous. A man giving himself to the pursuit of a scientific hobby or a political enterprise engaging the enthusiasm of ungodly crowds, or to the cultivation of friendships on the basis of the present evil world, burdens himself with heavy weights which are almost certain to sink him into perdition in an elegant style. One thing is needful ; with others we can dispense. We *must* have the knowledge of God in the power thereof sufficient to transform the natural man into the likeness of the divine moral image. We *must* be spiritually-minded, for any other state means death. We *must* walk as friends of God ; and as such we cannot have friendship with the world, which is revealed as His enemy, and friendship with whom He counts enmity to Himself. We *must* be filled with wisdom—the wisdom which is from above—the wisdom which comes from and relates to God ; for the absence of it ensures our repudiation by Him in the day when He makes up His jewels. And to secure this wisdom, we must apply ourselves continually to its acquisition ; for the acquisition thereof is difficult and a work of time. Like the precious things of Nature, God has made wisdom a hidden thing, requiring search, and which the hand of the diligent only at last obtains. There is, therefore, no time for the occupations of folly. True saints recognize the necessity for working out their own salvation. To them Peter’s exhortation is no meaningless one, that they be diligent to make their calling and election sure. They recognize the immense dangers to which they are exposed. They resist, as the most diabolical of devilish delusions, either the theory of light within, on the one hand, or the Calvinistic fatalistic no-will-of-your-own doctrine on the other—doctrines which both alike seduce from the path of earnest heedfulness to the means of our salvation, which God has provided for us in His Word.

And by constant meditation on all they see around them, they aim to realize to themselves the evanescent character of the present life, and so to be helped in the diligent pursuit of that which is truly real and important. History and general knowledge are here a help. They assist the understanding to cope with and put to flight the delusion of the senses. They enable us to see and to feel, in spite of the constant, importunate, and plausible appeals of the natural man, *alias* the devil, to the contrary, that our present existence is in itself no more real than the vapour to which James compares it ; and thus numbering our days, we are taught to apply our hearts to wisdom. Looking back, we see busy generations struggling up life’s rugged hill, all with the same hopeful eagerness, all with the same

SEASONS OF COMFORT

ardent anxieties, all with the same idea of the importance of the affairs in hand ; and as we see them gain the top and descend the other side, we notice the same toning down, the same disappointment, the same vanity and vexation of spirit, and the same quiet grave at the bottom. As we contemplate the scene, we say with Isaiah, " Surely the people is grass " ; and with another prophet, " Lord, we are no better than our fathers " ; and with another, " Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain ? What man is he that liveth and shall not see death ? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave ? " (Psa. 89 : 47, 48) ; and with a fourth we pray, " Return, O Lord, how long ? . . . Make us glad according to the days wherein thou has afflicted us, and the years wherein we have seen evil. Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us : and establish thou the work of our hands upon us ; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it." We hear the answer as we read, " Thy dead men shall live . . . awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust " (Isa. 26 : 19). " I will ransom them from the power of the grave ; I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues ; O grave, I will be thy destruction " (Hos. 13 : 14). " O Jacob, I will restore health unto thee, and will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord ; because they called thee an outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after " (Jer. 30 : 17). " In this mountain the Lord of hosts shall make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy the face of the covering that is cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. 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 all the earth ; for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo : this is our God ; we have waited for Him and he will save us . . . We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." " The tabernacle of God shall be with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain : for the former things are passed away " (Rev. 21 : 3, 4).

Present Suffering

Christ as a sufferer.—A material part of his sufferings mental.—The cause of them in the godless state of men.—An affectionate believer sure to have similar experience.—A more difficult martyrdom than the faggot.—Martyrdom and penances vain.—God pleased only with loving obedience.—The age of true martyrdom not passed away.—Two kinds of deprivation.—Self-denial and faith.—The honour of pleasing God.—Hope with fear.—The necessity of earnest heed.—The power of the fear of God.—The fit and the unfit for the kingdom of God.—The reasonableness of the divine principle of retribution.—Picture of a cemetery.—The resurrection.—After that, God's business.—Who fit for it.—Those who have sought first the kingdom.—Misplaced moderation.—Unheeded exhortation.—The right course.—The last speech.—The glorious day coming.—Its foundation.

It belongs to us, brethren and sisters, peculiarly on the present occasion, to contemplate "the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow." Of course, we can only do so in a cursory and superficial manner, for the phrase when thoroughly followed out in all its significance covers the whole ground of what God has been pleased to reveal to us, both in its practical bearing upon us in the matter of duty, and in its future relation to us as a matter of hope. Still, *a little edification is better than none*, and we cannot look upon the sufferings of Christ, or the glory which is to follow, without being edified.

Christ was a sufferer in a sense which perhaps few people realize. The majority of persons are apt to look at the cross, and the cross only, and to imagine that the sufferings of Christ relate only to the physical pain he experienced in being put to so cruel a death, or at most to the anguish of feeling to which he was subjected in being mocked and insulted by a crowd of soldiery. To those, however, who study Christ's life attentively, and particularly in the light of what the spirit of Christ has testified in the Psalms as to the sufferings of Christ, it becomes manifest that those sufferings were much more widely spread over his life than is popularly imagined; that they consisted largely of the *mental suffering* caused by the present evil state of things among men; that, in fact, he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. His sorrow and his grief were of a sort that many, and we might add, that nearly all, are unsusceptible of. Christ had a high conception—far higher than ever we can hope to reach—of what men ought to be, and of the position that God ought to occupy among men, and therefore he felt a pain that none could experience who were not of the same state of mind, in mingling with men who were, on the whole, as regards God, like the brutes. We find that we come into fellowship with the sufferings of Christ in proportion as we grow up to him, and become like him, drinking in his spirit, sharing his tastes, and laying hold of his hopes. We come to find that it is no empty metaphor which likens the people of God to strangers and pilgrims, having here no continuing city. We come to feel that David did not speak extravagantly when he said, "My flesh longeth as in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." "I am like a pelican of the wilderness: I am like an owl of the desert." If you examine the Psalms

SEASONS OF COMFORT

where these expressions of misery occur, you will find that they all have relation to the moral and mental attitude of the men around him. David suffered from the godlessness of those who became his enemies, and from the proud indifference or brutish inertia of men whose portion is in this life, and who have not set God before them. In this, David was a preliminary exhibition of Christ, for the spirit of Christ was in him and made use of him to paint, in advance, so to speak, the portrait of the inner personal experiences of the Lord.

Now anyone who lays hold of the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, with the result which those things were given to produce, will feel in fellowship with his sufferings on these points ; he will feel alone ; he will feel that the present is an evil world in a high sense ; he will feel a pilgrim in the midst of it. It is well to see this ; for in proportion as we see it, we are able to reconcile ourselves to our position and to go through our course with much less chafe than we should experience if we were to go upon the supposition that we were to find things satisfactory in the present. If we act upon the idea that we are now to find edification, comfort, pleasure in all around, or to any great extent anywhere, we shall be grievously disappointed, because we shall be finding at every step that it is impossible at present to realize the aspirations of our hearts—impossible for a great variety of reasons. Even if the world were all we could wish, we are now in ourselves only flesh and blood, and that is a weak thing both physically and spiritually. We do not require to live in the first century to fellowship the sufferings of Christ. We may have thought so in the first days of our spiritual childhood. We all, no doubt, had the idea that we required to be put in prison, and to have the officer of the law come into our houses and take our things, or that we should be led forth to the stake or have our heads cut off, before we should suffer with Christ. We come to see the fallacy of that idea as we grow older. In one respect we are called upon to endure a more difficult martyrdom than the faggot or the block. Many have undergone that kind of martyrdom whom Christ will not acknowledge in the day of his coming. In the early centuries, many rushed into that kind of martyrdom upon the same principle as that which leads the votaries of the Roman Catholic religion to submit to painful penances. Dreadful things have been suffered in the way of penances. The Emperor Charles V, who was one of the mightiest potentates in Europe for nearly half a century, after his abdication, lacerated his flesh with thorns and instruments of torture, ordered his coffin and lay in it, conducted his own burial service, and went through many physical sufferings, with the idea that by going through all those sufferings he would appease God for all the misdeeds of his life, and earn a place in the world to come. But Charles V was an unjustified sinner. We know that God is not pleased with will worship, that is, with anything man can devise for His satisfaction. He is pleased only with our compliance with what He appoints ; and all His appointments aim at the very contrary result secured by penances. For, if you examine such matters to the root, you will find that they have their root in self-satisfaction and the desire to pay God off. Wicked people feel that God has a claim on them, so to speak, and they want to pay Him off, and be independent ; whereas, the true worship which God exacts excludes that feeling entirely, and brings us to the recognition

of the fact that we cannot pay God off. All we can do is to obey Him in thanksgiving for His goodness in offering us forgiveness on the recognition of our position. The poor creatures who allow themselves to be crushed under the car of Juggernaut have just as much ground for hoping they will be saved as the Emperor Charles V, and the multitudes who, under the influence of a similarly perverted idea, in the second, third and fourth centuries, rushed to the faggot under the delusion that they were making themselves sure of a heaven before uncertain. It is painful to read the writings of professed Christians of that time. One of the fathers of the so-called Christian Church—Ignatius—takes the lead in that kind of pernicious teaching, by which men were taught to regard martyrdom as the true way into the kingdom of God.

The age of true martyrdom has not passed away. We are invited to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to God, and that is a far more difficult kind of sacrifice to offer than that which is at an end almost as soon as the pain is felt. Death by the sword or at the stake is sharp, short, and decisive, but a living sacrifice is a living martyrdom. It is a living mortification—tedious and protracted suffering ; it is a waiting for God in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation ; it is an obeying of commandment which are irksome to the natural man ; it is submitting to a trial which is not joyous, but grievous. How is that ? Because God forbids those who are invited to be heirs of His kingdom to be friends with the world, or to seek for pleasure in the present time. Those who are at liberty to be friends with the world, and to seek for pleasure in the present time, have a great deal to entertain them ; and those who accept the calling to which God has called all who have ears to hear, experience the deprivation ; though I admit that after a while, the deprivation is felt in a different direction. What I mean by that is this : they do not feel the deprivation of present gratifications such as they are called upon to leave, for they learn to hate these, seeing that they are built on the wrong foundation. The world disregards God ; they follow pleasure for its own behoof, and a saint learns to have no pleasure in anything from which God is absent, so that if he could, he would not take part ; but he feels the deprivation in another way. He learns not only to hate those things, but to love another set of things, and the things he loves are not present to him except by faith. If they were present to us now, there would be thousands who would make the exchange ; indeed, it is possible that three-fourths of the human race would make the exchange at once, if as soon as a man believed and obeyed the Gospel he became immortal, and the subject of glory and honour. But then, they would do it for the sake of getting something better than they had, and God is not pleased to bestow the highest good on that principle. He offers the highest good on condition of pleasing Him, and not pleasing ourselves. This uninviting religion of faith gives us that opportunity. God is not pleased with anything short of it. “ Without faith it is impossible to please him ” ; but He has given us an opportunity of pleasing Him. What a great honour if we could only realize it ! What a great dignity for mortal men to have placed in their hands the power of giving satisfaction to the Creator of heaven and earth. He has given us that opportunity in Christ ; but in giving us that opportunity He requires that the good things spoken of in the Gospel be postponed, and the deprivation, therefore, relates to

SEASONS OF COMFORT

our being cut off, for the time being, from the things that are to come.

Nevertheless, we see them. Abraham saw them : he lived a long time ago, but he saw them, and was glad. That is Jesus' testimony : "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day ; and he saw it, and was glad." Abraham is the father of the faithful ; that is, he is the leading specimen of the kind of people with whom God is well pleased. We also look forward ; we see, and we are glad ; but our rejoicing is only in hope, and is mixed with weakness and with fear. We are told to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Why with fear ? The question is answered : "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it." That is an apostolic reply to the question. With all our joy in looking forward to the rest before us, our rejoicing is moderated by the apprehension that possibly we may fail to enter in. Christ said, when Peter asked him upon the point, that many should seek to enter in but should not be able. Why not able ? Because they are not in earnest about it ; they do not give enough energy to it. "We ought to give the more earnest heed," says Paul, "to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." Many fail to attend to the things in this earnest way ; they lay hold of the kingdom of God, but, at the same time, keep hold of twenty other things. They devote their best faculties and their principal time to the promotion of objects unconnected with Christ entirely, and which are not even necessary for them in the provision of their livelihood. A man, of course, must labour for his daily bread, and, in fact, that may be made a service of God ; for it is one of the teachings of Paul that whatever a man doeth, he is to do it heartily as to the Lord, and not unto men. He says that to servants ; so we have it in our hands to turn everything to spiritual account if we are wise. I am referring, however, to people who are under no obligation to attend to things they have in hand, but who choose them as a matter of special taste, as a matter of honour, or as a matter of respectability. These things engross all their energies, run away with their time, and steal their hearts, so that the things of God have little hold upon them, and, therefore, they fail.

Our rejoicing therefore is mixed with fear, and ought to be so. No one should slacken his hand until his course is run. Never put off the day of wisdom. If we reject wisdom for our own convenience, wisdom will reject us. It is one of the delusions we have to be on our guard against.

"While the lamp holds out to burn,

The vilest sinner may return."

That is what is said by the false prophets of modern religion. The Spirit of God says : "Be not deceived ; God is not mocked : for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." It will be too late for a man to hurry up and to be spiritually-minded when he finds himself in the grasp of death.

What a refreshing thing it is to see men and women under the power of the fear of God. We need not fear men ; we need not fear what brother this or brother that may say, because in a short time, in the order of nature, all men will be in their graves, and there will be no reality in relation to us then except God, His mind, His purpose, and His judgment. Therefore we need not vex ourselves, or encumber our spiritual operations with anxieties about

the opinions of our fellows ; let us be right with Christ. To be right with him, requires that we be in earnest, and all the time in earnest. Recollect his somewhat abrupt declaration to a young man who came to him, saying, " Lord, I will follow thee, but suffer me first to go and bury my father," and to whom Jesus said, " Let the dead bury their dead : but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." What is the application of that saying, unless it be to suggest that the young man in question by proposing to do something else besides seeking the kingdom of God, was as a man turning his hand from the plough ? Christ's stern declaration is that such a man is not fit for the kingdom of God. That implies that there are some who are " fit," and some who are " not fit," and it also shows who are they that are " fit." Those who are fit are those who lay hold with full purpose of heart and accept the calling in Christ in its entirety. That calling is a thing that is very exacting indeed ; it claims absolute ascendancy with those of whom it lays hold. It is a very different thing from the religion preached from the pulpits of the churches and chapels. The clergy give the people to understand, though they do not say so in express words, that they need not be very much taken up with religion, that a sprinkling of it will be sufficient ; whereas the truth of Christ demands to be the object of life, the principle of action, the subject of supreme affection—the engrossing thing.

How reasonable this seems when we allow ourselves to realize all the surrounding facts of the case, and the end of every human being. Walk through a cemetery, for instance, and read the tombstones. There you have a sleeping congregation of people, who have done with life. There are all sorts—from the grey-haired captain who acquired military or naval honours in various parts of the world, and in the language of Parliamentary compliment, " deserved well of his country," to the unknown pauper who drivelled out his inglorious days in the workhouse. There are merchants under these sods, who, in their day, had risen to the top of the social scale by their industry and by talents which were highly applauded as their own, and who died in the lap of luxury. And there are beautiful daughters of rich men, who pined away in the surfeit of luxury, when, perhaps, a fair battle with the rough responsibilities of life might have saved them from an early grave. And there are also strong young men and beautiful children, with whom parents had to part, and whom, too, notwithstanding breaking hearts, they have had to follow into the grave. There they lie a common mass of corruption, " unknowing and unknown," forgotten in the land of the living.

Now, let us imagine that we are included in that congregation, as we certainly shall be if the Lord arrest not the course of nature by his coming, and let us imagine the time for resurrection come. On the one side of the resurrection-line there is the past—the human past, with its dropped burden of human anxieties and human business ; and on the other side, what is there ? God's business ; God's business on a large scale. Christ is at the head of it. He puts aside the kings first and all their governments, and his great business is to exalt the name of God in the earth, and to bring the nations into subjection and harmony with him. Now, whom of all that congregation of the dead, whose mortal days and mortal concerns are all gone, whom of them would you select to be companions of Christ in this mighty work upon earth, which has as its object the exaltation of the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

honour of God's name for ever and ever, in the countless population with which the earth is yet to be peopled? Would you think it a large price to ask of any of that dead, rotting congregation, for the privilege of immortal partnership in this work, that they should have devoted their mortal affections, their mortal energies, their mortal day, their mortal opportunities, to holding up the name of Christ in the day of his disgrace? I am sure that no one realizing the matter would falter in the decision. Everyone would say, it was most reasonable that people who lived for themselves should reap what they had sown. The great majority of the dead lived for mortal life; and they cannot complain that they get and perish for what they worked. All they worked for was to have good things to put into their mouths, fine clothes to put on their backs, and the satisfaction of "respectability" in their day and generation. They got what they worked for; they had their reward; therefore, what would you bring them forward into the kingdom of God for? The kingdom of God is for those only who seek it first, and work for it in a practical, enthusiastic way, and are considered fools for their pains. Let us then, brethren, never listen for a moment to those who would hinder in the good fight by recommending what is called "temperance" and "moderation" in the things of Christ. Their exhortations are altogether misplaced, and altogether uncalled for. The tendencies of the sluggish beast of the natural man are sufficiently powerful in that direction to render it quite needless for anyone to exhort us in that line. We need exhorting the other way. We want continually to be pulled up in the direction of the path which the Captain of our Salvation himself has trodden before us, and in which he is, so to speak, leading us on. We know what sort of path that was. We know he was no "mild" and "moderate" man in the things of God. We know he had no schemes in hand but the one scheme of God's purpose. We know that he was never found trimming his sails to worldly breezes, or emulating or inculcating worldly principles; he devoted himself solely to the work which the Father gave him, and his relation to the world was one of continued antagonism. Our work, and our attitude, if we are his brethren, will be the same. The work may be different now in its external form, but it is the same work for all that, based upon the same testimonies and the same principles, and aiming at the same end—the purifying of a peculiar people for the inheritance of the kingdom of God. Let us not fear to give ourselves to it with all our hearts. We shall not regret it when that day comes to us, or when we shall gasp out the vital energy which keeps us going for the time being. We shall look back with satisfaction on our little course if we are able to say, "Well, I know my efforts were weak, and I know my shortcomings were many, but I have sought to serve Christ to the extent of my mortal possibilities as circumstances allowed, and although it has been a toilsome career, hard work, and unsatisfactory in some respects, I am glad to look back upon it, and would do as I have done if I have to live it over again." On the other hand, the men or the women who have merely mild notions of Christ, and who have been devoting themselves to personal aims connected with this mortal life, as the object of their exertions, when they get through their comfortable drive and come to die, will be far other than satisfied with the account they will have to look upon; they will be filled with consternation when they come to present it.

It is a glorious day that is coming, but glorious only in a certain line of things. The greatness and the glory of the day of Christ are all on a certain foundation. The glory, and the foundation of the glory, are both visible in the Psalm that has been read. Let us glance at them for a moment. "The Lord reigneth." What is the leading feature of the system of government and of human life when the Lord reigneth? "The Lord is great in Zion; he is high above all the people. Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy." "Exalt ye the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy." The recognition of the greatness of God is the foundation of the glory of those glorious "good times coming." It is testified that all nations shall come and worship before God; and that the knowledge of the glory of God shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea; God's will shall be done upon earth as it is done in heaven. There will be glory to God in the highest at the time that there is peace on earth.

Now, in contrast to this, just look at the world at present. What does it know or care for the greatness and the glory of God? What conception has it of His holiness? Speak to it of such matters, and your speech is to them the speech of a madman. This helps us to realize how thoroughly evil the world is. Some people have a difficulty in realizing the truth on this point. They certainly think the world was bad at the time of the Roman emperors, and at the time that Christ appeared; but they have an idea that now we are advancing by slow degrees towards an age of progress and enlightenment, and that in fact the world as a whole is already tolerably righteous. The prevalence of this idea is only proof of the ignorance that exists as to the nature of true enlightenment and true civilization. The world lieth in wickedness now as much as it did in the days of John. The wickedness has only changed its form a little. Wickedness in our day is refined; it is cultivated; it is methodical; it has got on a beautiful skin outside, but according to the Divine standard, it is, perhaps, more probrate than the untutored barbarism of early days. It is more proud and more blind to its weakness and dependence. The barbarians had some notion of a God, and entertained some idea that they must give some service to that God; but this miserable world of modern civilization is like to burst with exaggerated notions of its own importance. It is ripe for destruction. It is respectable enough according to current notions of respectability; but, in the eyes of God, it is sunk in corruption as much as it was before the flood, when mankind had corrupted His way upon the earth. Mankind have now utterly corrupted His way, and are walking after a thousand imaginations of their evil hearts, fearing not the Possessor of heaven and earth, regarding not His law, nor caring to know the state of the poor. Christ is, with them, a byword. We are close to the time when it is revealed that the angel—the symbolic angel with the sickle—will gather the harvest of the earth and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God, that it may be trodden by him to whom alone is allotted this great mission, even the Man of Sorrows who, in his day, bore testimony to the wickedness of the world; who upheld the faith and the honour of God, and who is to have the great honour of executing the work of judgment when the time arrives. To that work and that great honour we are called if we are of his spirit, if we are his brethren, if we have a family likeness to him. The family likeness in this case, is a thing of principle and

SEASONS OF COMFORT

not of flesh and blood, and the principle shines through the gorgeous picture of the kingdom presented in this Psalm. It is the greatness of God and holiness unto Him. "Be ye holy," Christ said to his disciples, and, therefore, to us. We may imagine him standing here this morning and saying, "Be ye holy"; and his apostles coming after him and saying the same thing: "Be ye holy in all manner of conversation." This is a practical exhortation. There are things which we ought to dismiss as inconvenient and unbecoming in sons of God, and Paul mentions among them covetousness, jesting, and foolish talking. These are things which waste and burn up the mind. There are indulgences in common follies which dry up the spiritual sap and engender aversion to spiritual things. Let us avoid them. Remember, we are going on to the state symbolized by the four heraldic living creatures of the Israelitish commonwealth, full of eyes, and which rest not day and night, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. . . . Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." We are to be incorporated in those four living ones if we are acceptable to Christ at his coming; and that acceptability will only exist then if we are now constituents of the peculiar people. Christ is working now; purifying the people unto himself, and he has been working at this work ever since he went away, through the instrumentality employed.

It is hard work in our generation. The world is in such a wretched plight with regard to the truth, that we cannot begin where the apostles began. The apostles began straight off, whereas we have to convince men of the elementary principles. We have to begin at the very foundation, and show that man is mortal; that Christ is coming, and that the kingdom of God is to be established on earth. Consequently, there is the tremendous danger that people getting to know these elementary things may think they are all right, whereas the fact of the matter is that the foundation is only laid for the work of fashioning them into the likeness of the people prepared for the Lord. Well, if the difficulties are great, no doubt Christ's sympathies are great; if our situation is peculiarly discouraging, no doubt our welcome before him, if we overcome, will be correspondingly cordial. He may say: "Many believed on me who saw the signs and wonders of the apostolic age, but ye saw them not, and yet believed: blessed are ye; enter now into the glory revealed." In prospect of that, and with the desire for such a reception, let us continue patient in this well-doing; breaking bread from Sunday to Sunday, daily reading the word and persevering under all circumstances, however discouraging, in the patient observance of all the things that Christ has commanded.

Christ and the Prophets

Christ and Ezekiel.—The prophets and Jesus one and not dissimilar.—God speaking in both cases to the same nation with the same purpose.—The work of Christ merely a different form.—The solution of the mystery involved in the prophets.—The Gentiles brought into the channel of Israel's blessing.—A cause of gladness.—Sorrowful yet always rejoicing.—Another class.—In the truth without its sorrows, carnally glorying in enlightenment.—The object of adoption from a divine point of view.—A disfigured saintship and the saintship of Scriptural type.—A hard battle.—The day of victory.—The glory of God a magnificent reality notwithstanding cant and hypocrisy.—The Bible not to be understood apart from the principle, all things for God, and for man in God.—A different idea from the philosophy of the churches.—Souls not precious.—All flesh grass.—God will save such as fear Him.—Circumstances in which God will not receive the advances of men.

IN our readings this morning, we have had brought before us two speakers—Ezekiel and Jesus. In the days of our ignorance, we should all have had the idea, derived from the unscriptural system of things around us, that there was nothing in common between two such speakers. We should have looked upon Ezekiel and the prophets in general as belonging to an effete age, in which they served their purpose and with which they had passed away, leaving nothing for us to do but to admire their abstract beauty as historic monuments of faithfulness and stern devotion to duty, invigorating, after a fashion, to contemplate, but not involving anything of especial consequence for us to know or consider. Christ we should at the same time have looked at as representing a new age—an entirely new and different style of things—a totally dissimilar system of thought, feeling, and idea. This view of things, in which there is only the smallest element of truth, is common in the professing Christian world. It is fostered by elegant writings which are not according to knowledge, but the mere outgrowth of scholastic theology, which is flimsy, insipid, and unreal; being based upon the thoughts and theories of men, and not upon a reverent acceptance of revealed truth.

A knowledge of the truth has emancipated us from this mistaken idea, and enabled us to realize the fact presented to us by Paul when he says, in Heb. 1 : 1, "GOD, who at sundry times and divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." We have God speaking in both cases, and to the same nation and for the same purpose. In the words of the parable illustrative of this very point, "He sent his servants to the husbandmen of the vineyard that they might receive the fruits of it . . . but last of all he sent unto them his Son" (Matt. 21 : 33-41). The mission of the prophets was to bring Israel to obedience of the things commanded them, as we read in Jer. 7 : "Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt unto this day, I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets . . . This thing commanded I them, saying, Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people : and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you" : and what was the mission of

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Christ so far as his personal ministrations were concerned? Was it not the same? He said, "I am sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel," and his command to them in all his preaching was, "Repent," and his teaching was that "except their righteousness exceeded the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, they should in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven."

There was doubtless a higher aspect to the work of Christ. "To him," as the climax of God's work with man, "gave all the prophets witness." In him was to be accomplished the mystery hid from ages, how God was to be just and yet the justifier of transgressors of Adam's race unto life eternal, and the way thus opened in one man for the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile. In him was to be accomplished the resolution of the problem how condemned men were to be saved by obedience and yet the glory of it should be alone to Jehovah. In him was to be historically illustrated the name Emmanuel—God with Israel reconciling them to Himself, and not imputing their trespasses unto them—giving us in one man the glory of the Father, and the headship and brotherhood and obedience of the first-born among many brethren. Nevertheless, it was the same God speaking by him that spoke through the prophets, and the object of the speaking was the same in both cases: to induce men to turn from their evil ways and be reconciled to God. The form merely was different; the essence of the forms was identical. Israel were summoned by the prophets to turn to God with all their hearts, and to obey the commandments given by the hand of Moses: they were summoned by Jesus to turn to God with all their hearts, and obey the commandments delivered by *him*. In both cases the object of the summons, as far as Israel was concerned, was the same, "that it might be well with them," with this difference in the case of the summons by Christ, that he made the form and nature of the well-ness, so to speak, more definite and obvious. The resurrection and the kingdom of God were presented by him as the nature and the occasion of the great goodness in store for those who should fear, love, and obey him; while in the case of the prophets, they were permitted to speak only of the then present blessings which God should bestow upon Israel in case of obedience.

We Gentiles have been brought into the channel of this blessing through Israel's rejection of it at first. Christ, and afterwards Paul, confined his attention to his kinsmen according to the flesh; but Israel treating the offered goodness with scorn, the same salvation was offered to the Gentiles. Through this circumstance we are assembled here this morning, worshipping God through Christ, in hope of the promises made of God unto the fathers. We, who were once Gentiles in the flesh, without hope, have become fellow-citizens with all the saints of all past times. We have been adopted into the family. We have been lopped from the wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, on the good olive tree, and with the obedient natural branches, partaking of the fatness of the good Abrahamic olive tree. This is a position which, fairly realized, is calculated to inspire gladness. We are exhorted to rejoice in it. Frequent is this exhortation throughout the Scriptures: "Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous: shout for gladness of heart." It is well to give reins to our joy. It is true that joy is not an act of the will; we cannot force ourselves to be glad; still, we can review again and again the reasons we have for gladness, and by this our

gladness will take a new life, though our sorrow will not take final flight till the Lord come. We shall at least realize in ourselves the words of Peter, who, speaking concerning the promises, says, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:6-7).

"Sorrowful yet always rejoicing," is Paul's description of his own case: and it is a description that will be found applicable to the experience of every true saint of God. There is much on the surface, and, so far as this world is concerned, deep down as well, to cause continual sorrow of heart: but underneath all there is a constant current of joy in God, a satisfaction at the bottom that comes from leaning on Him, and trusting in Him, and hoping in Him, as well as regards the life that now is as that which is to come. Therefore, while avoiding the unseemly ecstasies of unenlightened sectaries, who mistake the electric combustion of the brain for a scriptural joy in God, it is good to remember the reasons we have for being glad, and indulge, in the midst of our many sorrows, in the joy which springs from a present confidence in God and the hope of that morning of brightness which He has promised, and only awaits the right season to reveal.

For another class, this exhortation has to be turned the other way round. There are those who presume upon their standing in the truth, and who forget that they have been called to obedience in many things required of them: and that their continuance in that Gospel is essential to their continuance in the position of favour to which they have been called by the Gospel. This class have none of the sorrows of the truth, and rejoice after the flesh in their connection with it. They look at others with disdain, and glory in their own enlightenment. They say like Israel, "The people of the Lord, the people of the Lord, the people of the Lord are we," but like them fail to sustain the character and position becoming the people of the Lord. Israel spoke the truth in a certain way when they said they were the people of the Lord; but they were cut off for all that, because while with their mouth they drew near to God, with their heart they were far from Him. So men may speak the truth in a technical sense in claiming to be the brethren of Christ, because they believe and have obeyed the Gospel, and at the same time they may be walking in utter unworthiness of the position, and may be in as great danger of being cut off as the natural branches of the good olive tree. Such have need to remember Paul's exhortation: "Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he spare not thee" (Rom. 11:21). To such, the exhortation has to be changed into a call to weeping: "Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord."

For what purpose are men grafted into Christ as branches into the living tree? It is that they may grow and bring forth fruit unto God—fruit that God will have pleasure in. So Christ has plainly told us. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he (my Father) taketh away. . . . Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit." And what is the fruit that is

SEASONS OF COMFORT

looked for? We have the answer in the expressed wish of Paul's, that the Corinthians might be "fruitful in every good work." And what are good works? Those only that God has required in His Word. There is none good but one—that is God: and there is no righteousness but that which has been constituted such by His Word. Hence, to be fruitful branches in the Christ-tree, men must do those things that Christ has commanded for his servants: otherwise, they are unfruitful branches. Of what advantage is it for a man to know the truth and to profess the name of Christ, if at the same time he think and speak and act in accordance with the grovelling instincts of the natural man, which are opposed to what Christ has required? How can a man hope to please Christ, who is conformed in all things to the present evil world, to which Christ did not belong, instead of being transformed in the renewing of his mind after the image of the new man, Christ? To such a man the truth is of no advantage whatever, but contrariwise, a positive calamity, as he will find in the day—near at the door—when Christ will say to all such, "I know you not, ye workers of iniquity." It is better not to know the way of truth at all, than, knowing it, to continue in the ways, works and maxims of the flesh. The saintship that is disfigured by a conformity to this God-forgetting, man-fearing, self-seeking, money-making, poor-neglecting, proud, unjust, merciless, impure, drunken, tobacco-stupefied age—is a saintship that will not be recognized by Christ, for Christ will recognize only the saintship of his own pattern, which is abundantly exhibited beforehand in the word of truth. That saintship is a saintship of zeal for God, independence of man, faithfulness to truth, purity (both of body and mind), righteousness, mercy, faith in God, love, meekness, gentleness, unselfishness, submission to evil, and kindness to the unfortunate—even if they are erring, fruitfulness in every good work, always abounding therein with thanksgiving, in the inextinguishable hope of the heavenly calling. This is the portrait drawn by the hand of the Spirit: the "image" exhibited for us to try and become conformed to.

We become conformed to it in "the renewing of our minds," which is effected by the word abiding in us, and the word abides by being continually implanted in the reading and study of it. The mind is made of plastic material, and is being modified every day, for good or evil, according to the influences that play upon it. It is more easily affected for evil than good, because its natural bent is in the direction of evil. Hence the battle is a hard one, and must be maintained to the last. Let us never surrender. Let us hold on to all the helps God has given us; let us avoid all the hindrances and the weights which so easily impede the journey and sink the steps in the mire of the devil's morass, that spreads far and wide on all sides around us. The day of victory will repay all exertion, for thus saith the Spirit: "He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron."

Of one principle, running through the whole of the divine economy, we must never lose sight. It is expressed by Peter thus: "That God in all things may be glorified." We may not meet with many who rise to this lesson of wisdom. It is a lesson that has become weakened and dimmed and marred by the hypocrisies and shallowness with which it has become associated in the apostasy of Christendom. The words have come millions

of times from heartless lips, on which they almost die for want of sincerity as they are uttered ; or they have been shot like sparks of fire from the throats of the tempestuous votaries of superstition, wrought into mesmeric excitement at "revival meetings" ; or they have come with a glib hollow sound from mouths that have never truly glorified God. They have come to be hackneyed and cant ; but they represent a great reality nevertheless—a reality which is the very heart and glory of the whole system of divine truth. That God may be exalted ; that He may be had in highest reverence ; that His unsearchable greatness may be recognized ; that His great power and goodness, and His underived and absolute prerogative, may be apparent to the sons of men in their deepest affections and profoundest adoration ; that His great name may be magnified and extolled, is the great object of all His recorded dealings, including that widest and greatest of them all, His permission of sin to reign unto death. Apart from this, His ways are not to be understood. It is no wonder that men do not understand the Bible ; I mean the intellectual talented men of literature. They ignore or do not appreciate its first principle—the honour of God. They look at it through the medium of the conceptions they have formed through the study of Nature, which can give them no information of the true reason of things. They interpret it in the light of mere philanthropy. They tacitly assume that creation exists for man alone, and that all things are to be judged good or bad according as it affects him. This philosophy stands between them and the Bible as a veil ; for the Bible exhibits a system of truth at variance with this philosophy in many points. The Bible shows us all things for God, and for man only in so far as man fulfils his part toward God. The chapter read from Ezekiel is an illustration of this kind of teaching. How frequent is this expression in it, in recounting and explaining his dealings with Israel : "I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen" (20 : 14). His very choice and manipulation of the house of Israel is, through another prophet, declared to have had for their object (Jer. 13 : 11) that they might be to Him "*for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory*" ; and by Isaiah, He says, "This people have I formed for myself ; they shall show forth all my praise." The same object is associated with the work of the Gospel. "God has visited the Gentiles, to take out a people *for his name*" ; and this people, when taken out, are taken out "that they should *show forth the praises of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light*" (1 Pet. 2 : 9). This is a very different idea from the idea that is current among "the churches" of Christendom. The idea current in Christendom is, that the great purpose connected with the Gospel is the salvation of men in the humanitarian sense. They are taught that a single soul is of priceless worth and that its rescue from a condition of suffering is the highest of the divine operations. Bible teaching (which is the teaching of eternal truth—and no other teaching is true), is the reverse of all this. It is that all flesh is as grass ; that all nations have gone out of the way and are become unprofitable and vain ; that they are of no value in the sight of God ; that, nevertheless, God, in His wisdom and kindness, will save such of them from death as will turn to Him with all their heart, abase themselves before Him, exalt His name, and do His commandments in reverence and fear.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

The Gospel is an invitation to men to come into this attitude that they may live ; and such in His sight are precious, in that they “ offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of their lips giving thanks to his name ” (Heb. 13 : 15). This is the Scriptural standard of saintship, and none other will avail. Men deceive themselves if they imagine they will be saved, merely because they have come to know that man is mortal and that the kingdom of David will be re-established under Christ at his coming. It is well for them to know the truth ; but the truth will only be to their condemnation if they fail to bring forth the fruit which God looks for from the knowledge of it.

Israel, to whom Ezekiel was sent, were acquainted with the truth so far as revealed ; and “ certain of the elders,” we are told, in the first verse of the chapter read (20), even “ came to enquire of the Lord,” and sat before Ezekiel. What was the answer of the Lord to them ? “As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be enquired of by you ” (verse 3). There are circumstances in which God will not receive men’s advances, and in which He will even lay stumbling-blocks before them to turn them out of the way (Ezek. 3 : 20). Both Israel and the Gentiles are illustrations. After long patience, God poured the spirit of slumber upon the mental faculties of the Jews, because they took no delight in His appointments, and honoured not His name ; and on the Gentiles also, to whom He sent His messengers in the first century, armed with the gifts of the Spirit, He finally “ sent a strong delusion, because they received not the truth in the love of it.” These illustrations are of individual service to us. They show us that our knowledge will be no advantage to us unless we carry that knowledge to its legitimate results. If our hearts are not set on things above instead of on things on earth ; if the fear of God is not before our eyes all day long : and praise of His name on our lips, and thanksgiving and supplication in our hearts ; if our deeds are not framed in accordance with His law, in holy and trembling regard for His Word, and in true and contrite humility before Him, we fail to present the features that will characterize the family that will be gathered together in glorious unity in the day of Christ, to ascribe “ blessing, and glory, and honour, and power unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever.”

Christ and Nature

Nothing in Nature to remind us of Christ.—Christ to be found only in the testimony, and brought home to us in the breaking of bread.—The naturalist an admirer, but not a son.—The sons of God will be for ever.—The danger of mere rationalism.—All education a fight against it.—The only complete education.—The mind of the Spirit.—Minding the things of the Spirit.—Human forgetfulness, especially in divine matters.—Bible reading a necessity.—Otherwise we drift with the current.—No fear of spiritual extremes.—These self-corrective, while the natural man's extremes are not so.—Natural extremes become more extreme.—A carnal and a useless life.—The only valuable possession in view of Christ's coming.—A prudent and pleasant investment.—False maxims.—The standard of the word.—The breaking of bread.—Its necessity.—The blessing we lose if we neglect it.—A joyful sitting down in the kingdom of God.

WE do well to come here to remember Christ. There is nothing to remind us of him in our daily surroundings : on the contrary, everything tends to hide him from our view. The sight of the eyes is blindness in this matter. The crowded thoroughfares tell us he is not a reality. The busy haunts of business—the bank, the exchange, the market, the docks, the warehouse, the workshop—seem to say he is a myth. The quiet walks of life are no more reliable ; the office, the house, the family, the laboratory, the garden, whisper that there is no Christ. Even Nature in her silent proclamation of God tells us not the truth in this matter. She tells us in her majestic solitudes that there must be a Master somewhere, and a purpose equal to her greatness : but she speaks not of Christ as the answer to our needs. If she only is our teacher, with all the great sky, the mighty mountain, the towering crag, the deep ravine, the thick forest and smiling plain, the opening flower and hum of insect life, the song of the birds and the lowing cattle, the beautiful landscape and the great and wide sea—she will but fill us with a sense of dreariness as of the emptiness of a majestic hall interior without an audience or entertainment.

To find Christ we must seek him where he is to be found, and where, at present, God has appointed he should only be found. It hath pleased God by the foolishness (so esteemed of men) of preaching to save them that believe. Christ is presented to us in that preaching, and the preaching takes a variety of forms. The apostles are dead, but they preach to us in the words they have written, and in these words they preach Christ. That is, they speak of one of whom we should otherwise know nothing, and that one “the heir of all things” and disposer of all destiny on earth. That mighty personage was once on earth himself, expounding all “the things concerning himself” out of “Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.” He is now absent “for a little while,” and we hear not his voice, but he preaches to us in the ordinance delivered unto us, which we have met this morning to keep, and by which we “show forth his death until he come.” The result of the preaching is to create in the mind a perception of his reality, from which springs “the conviction of things hoped for” ; and this is faith,

SEASONS OF COMFORT

without which it is impossible to please God. This faith is accounted to us for righteousness ; God is pleased with it, and condescends to recognize it as righteousness in us, for Christ's sake, in whom His righteousness hath been declared in the condemnation of sin in the likeness of sinful flesh. This imputing of our faith for righteousness is justification by faith, in which we have " peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," and are become " joint heirs with Christ " of " the glory to be revealed."

Now, the mere naturalist has no access to this faith, " in which we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God." He is simply a beholder, and, it may be, an admirer, of the beautiful features of Nature as God has organized it, but without knowing God himself or sympathizing with the purpose of which Nature is but the platform or raw material. He is himself, therefore, a mere passing object of Nature, like the creatures he studies, and whose bones, perhaps, he collects. He is not a " son," but a " slave " ; and the slave abideth not in the house, but the son abideth ever. He is of the " world," of which John says, that it " passeth away " ; in contrast to which, he adds, " but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." The sons of God, who are not mere admirers of the works of God, but do His pleasure, will live for ever. This is God's purpose, and though not visible now, will in its due season become as obvious a fact as the stability of Nature. Our concern is to belong to that most privileged order of men. In the promotion of this concern, we must be on our guard against mere naturalism. All of us have more or less a bias in that direction. Our native tendency as men is to remain ignorant of all things, and act in accordance with superficial appearances. To war against this tendency is to fight the good fight. Educationists are at war with it in a certain department ; but their operations are too limited to secure lasting results. They are directed to knowledge of Nature and the improvement of mortal life. The operations of the apostles in which we may be comprehended by the study of their word, are directed to a knowledge of God and His purposes, and a consequent redemption from mortality itself at the last. It is here where the truly good fight has to be fought. This is the warfare in which we are engaged : to bring the natural mind into subjection to the mind of God. The natural mind—the mind left to its own tendencies and resources—is, by the testimony of Paul, in which all experience concurs, " enmity against God : it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be ; so then, they that are in the flesh cannot please God."

The mind of the Spirit is exhibited to us in the word delivered to us by the Spirit through chosen men in ancient times, which word hath been " written for our learning." Consequently, our aim must be to learn that mind, and to be subject to it in all things. To be subject to the word is to be subject to the Spirit. To have the spirit of the word is to have the mind of the Spirit. If we fail in attaining this mind, we fail in attaining the end of the Gospel, and our salvation is not possible. We may know the Gospel and be damned by it instead of saved. It has two sides : and is either a savour of life unto life, or death unto death. It is better not to know the way of life, than knowing it, to trifle with it, or turn from the holy commandments delivered unto us. Its object is to create a zealous and peculiar people for Christ, whose zeal and peculiarity are due to the implantation of the spirit of the word in all the fulness and fervour which are reasonable. In some,

this mission is accomplished ; in others it is not. The difference is visible on the principle stated by Paul : " They that are after the flesh *do mind the things of the flesh* ; they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." The Spirit in its moral power, dwells in the one class, and dwells not in the other ; the mind of the other is pre-occupied with other interests, affinities and schemes which choke the word and render it unfruitful. The reason is to be found in the fact that the one class submits to the operation of the agency God has appointed for bringing about the indwelling of the word ; and the other does not. The one obeys the exhortation of Paul, to " let the word of Christ dwell in them richly " : the other gives it no heed, but drifts on in the current of creature gratifications in the thousand matters that constitute " this present evil world."

The agency which God has appointed for bringing about the indwelling of the word is based upon the fact of human forgetfulness. There is a constitutional need for bringing it to remembrance. Every man of reflection experiences this need. Even in human knowledge, the memory has constantly to be refreshed ; how much more in the things of the Spirit, for which there is not only no natural affinity, but to which there is a constitutional repugnance. We should make a great mistake if we were to rest on our oars at all. The achievements of the past are only valuable to us if we preserve our connection with them by means of an unbroken line of similar action. This refers to present profitableness and divine approbation : we must in many ways " endure to the end." We know the truth, it may be, but it does not follow that we can afford to let the study of it alone. Even as respects knowledge, the word of God is so constituted that we cannot become acquainted with all its teaching apart from daily reading and thought ; but what shall we say as to the personal views, tastes, and affections which it is intended to engender ? It is here where our greatest need exists. The current of the natural mind is in the opposite direction to the mind of the Spirit, and that current is strengthened by all the circumstances to which we are related in life, whether in business or at home. We cannot hope to make headway against this current apart from the daily reading and meditation of the testimonies of God. If we suspend this process—if we become lax in our attention to them, we shall as surely drift in the wrong direction as a boat set loose will drift down the stream. We shall slowly but surely come under the dominion of the carnal mind, in all our sentiments ; and " to be carnally minded is death."

We need all the helps we can get in our struggle with this tendency that draws to death. No fear of going to an extreme. The danger of extreme is all the other way. Extreme in a spiritual direction (such as there is any possibility of running into), is self-corrective, because the commands of the Spirit, daily pondered, will remind the liable extremist that there are other duties besides reading the Bible, and studying the truth, and prayer ; that there are duties in many things pertaining to this life which require attention, and which yet may be so performed as to be as much a doing of the will of God as any act in which we can engage. But the other extreme is not self-corrective : it binds its slaves in stronger and stronger fetters. The man who goes to an extreme in saving money, becomes more and more saving. The man who goes to an extreme in developing business, becomes more and more devoted to that object, and increasingly indifferent to

SEASONS OF COMFORT

everything else. The man who goes to an extreme in careful provision for family exigencies, becomes more and more careful and anxious, until the words of Christ, which tell us to be without carefulness, cease to have the least meaning for him. All these classes of extremists—and they are legion—sink at last into a state of spiritual torpor, in which all sensibility is gone. The present world, which they have loved, has slain them, while they continue to think they are alive. They imagine their spiritual interests will take care of themselves ; at all events, they can spare neither the time nor the money necessary for the promotion of them, and so precious life is wasted and thrown away, and the case of the fool with the barns is enacted over again. The result is inevitable : the man comes to die, and awakes to the fact that he has lived a carnal and useless life ; that he has laid up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God. Or Christ comes, and the same terrible disclosure opens to his eyes with still more staggering effect ; for where will all the careful provisions and snug arrangements of this life be when the Redeemer stands at last in this latter day upon the earth ? Everyone instinctively feels that in that day our personal affairs will have vanished into nothing ; and that the only valuable possession will be the answer of a good conscience in being able to think that we have used life, in things few or many, as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ—as good stewards of the grace of God—and have not unfaithfully appropriated it to ourselves. In that day, even such an extreme as half a fortune given to the poor (Luke 19 : 8), will be a prudent and pleasant investment, when a careful hoard for self and family will seem as a fire in the bones—a millstone burden that may sink the possessor to the depths of the sea. Prudence is reckoned all one way just now, because God is not in the reckoning. Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself. But when the true reckoning day arrives, men will return and discern between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not. It will then be discovered that the faithful use of unrighteous mammon does not consist of its careful consecration to personal and family interests (in which all the faithless world shine conspicuous) ; but in using it as trustees for Christ in this day of his shame in the many ways he has indicated. “ He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Every man is his own judge at present, but the earnest competitor for Christ’s approval will fear to be implicated in the unfaithfulness of any who teach or practise in opposition to his commandments, even and more particularly if such profess subjection to his name. The false maxims of a professor are more dangerous than those of the world, because those of the world have little weight, while disciples are apt to be influenced to their hurt by believers who have not learnt the practical principles of the house of God. We must be on our guard, and take our cue from the word only. “ If any man speak not according to this,” we know how to estimate his sayings. Such care will only be offensive to the children of the flesh : the children of God delight to be measured by the word, and to be brought to its standard. They may appear inconvenient and even odious at present, but the end will justify their attitude.

One of our helps in the right direction is this breaking of bread. It is Christ’s own appointment. Let us never neglect it. Let us never make the mistake of supposing we can do without it. We don’t know what we need : he who appointed this knows all. People who stay at home do not

know what they lose. The going out, the having the thoughts turned towards the things of God in a collective act, the seeing the brethren, and the going through the various exercises connected with the remembrance of Christ, are all quietly beneficial to an extent not known at the time ; and continued from first day to first day, they have a powerful moulding effect on the inner man. They are like the sunshine and rain, which act slowly and invisibly on the grain in the field, yet with effects which become very visible at last on a comparison with those fields which have been exposed to drouth and heat. The institution of the breaking of bread is based upon an exact knowledge of human nature and its needs. It helps to keep us in a healthful association of ideas, while it gives us the opportunity of a public acknowledgment of the Lord and the personal recognition of his despised friends. It is humiliating to the natural man who has any position in the present evil world, and who, sooner or later, finds reasons for backing out. Blessed are they who love Thy law, nothing shall them offend. Let us be found walking diligently in this, as in all the commandments of the Lord, blameless.

The day is near at hand when it will be apparent to all men that such a course "hath great recompense of reward" (Heb. 10 : 35). We shall be called upon to take part in this feast of love in another way. They were no vain words which Christ spoke when he said he would drink the passover wine with them new in the kingdom of God. There will be a joyful sitting down of many friends from all points of the compass with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets. While this sitting down is, doubtless, to be taken in the general sense of inheritance, it is equally doubtless that this inheritance will include many joyous assemblies of the saints, in which, with angelic attendance, we shall be permitted to sup and commune with the Lord. The poverty and humiliation of the present phase of the work of God will then have passed away ; the power and the glory and the unbelief and the scorn of men—so oppressive in their present ascendancy—will then be in the dust. God will be exalted in all the earth ; and in this exaltation every friend of His will participate with joy and strength. The terms of friendship are plainly revealed. Let us adhere to them with determination to the very end, that we may be of that happy number to whom will be addressed the words : "Come, ye blessed of my Father ; inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

The Wedding Garment

The parable of the marriage of the king's son.—The interpretation.—God's purpose to make a feast.—The invited guests.—The Jew first.—Then the Gentile.—The party of the highways and hedges.—Etiquette of the feast.—The wedding garment.—Individual righteousness.—Christ's righteousness alone insufficient.—It will justify a sinner but not ensure a saint's acceptance at the last.—The wedding garment not baptism.—Persevering well-doing the basis of acceptance.—Baptism only the first act.—The Spirit's wares.—The Divine merchant.—A beginning of goodness now.—But who shall declare the end?—The marriage supper of the Lamb.

OUR meeting this morning, and the meetings of all the brethren throughout the world, have a particularly interesting significance in the light of a certain parable spoken by Christ. The parable referred to the hostile attitude of the Jewish leaders, and the great body of Jewish people, towards himself. It was spoken to illustrate the real nature of that attitude from a Divine point of view. A man's course may appear one thing to himself, and be quite another in fact, when wholly seen. Paul, destroying the disciples in zeal for the law, appeared, in his own eyes, a righteous man, approved unto God ; in God's eyes he was "kicking against the pricks" : that is, he was hurting himself and not those against whom he was fighting. So the Scribes and Pharisees thought themselves defenders of the kingdom of God in opposing Christ, whereas, they were in reality excluding themselves from any part in it when it should be established in its final form. To set forth this was the object of the parable, and also to intimate certain consequences, highly unpalatable to them, which would result from their action. It is in those consequences that we are personally interested.

The parable is to be found in Matt. 22 and Luke 14. It is as follows : "A certain king . . . made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them which were bidden to the wedding : and they would not come . . . Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good : and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment : and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment ? And he was speechless. Then said the king unto his servants, Bind him hand and foot and take him away."

It is not difficult to discern the leading significances of this parable. In the king we recognize God, who spoke to the fathers and wrought with them for the execution of His purpose : that purpose is represented as a marriage feast for His Son. A marriage feast is the most joyous occasion in human experience, and fitly though feebly represents the character of God's great purpose with the sons of men. His purpose from the beginning has been to spread a banquet of love and every good thing in the earth. His Son is the

central object of this banquet. It is a marriage feast for His Son ; but before it could be a glory and joy to Him, there must be a partner and guests. The provision of these is from the human race by invitation. The invitation was first sent to Israel after the flesh, who were chosen as the national basis of the purpose. But the bulk of them did not accept the invitation, for lack of understanding. They accepted it in a certain way. They consented to be the Lord's people and rejoiced in the fact, but they used it for their own glory, and shut God out of the matter. They approached God with their lips but their hearts were far from Him. And therefore, after long patience, there came a time when the invitation was extended to another class.

It is here where our personal relation to the parable comes into view. Before Israel's rejection of the message, we were outside of its scope altogether - "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise." Till Paul's day, God suffered the Gentiles to walk in their own ways, and winked at the ignorance prevailing among them. This is testified (Acts 14 : 16 ; 17 : 30). Our ancestry is altogether undistinguished from this point of view ; we are the descendants of barbarians, who were without hope and without God in the world (Eph. 2 : 12). They had a hope and they had gods ; but both were matters of imagination, and, therefore, are not Scripturally recognized.

By the hand of Paul and his co-labourers, the invitation, which had been lightly regarded by Israel in their generations, was extended to the barbarians, and, therefore, to us. Here we are, this morning, a company of their descendants. We have not heard Paul's living voice, but we are none the less invited. The invitation, by Paul, has come to us. We have it here in our hands. We know from Paul's authority that that invitation was to survive his decease, and continue in force till the Lord's appearing. Consequently the fact of Paul's word having to come to us in the understanding of it, is evidence of the invitation referred to in the parable having come to us. The servants of the parable are commanded to go out to the highways and hedges. We belong to the party of the highways and hedges, which is destined to furnish a considerable contingent of guests to the marriage feast.

Here comes an important practical question, to which the parable furnishes an answer. Shall we be accepted as the King's guests merely because we have answered the King's summons by the hand of the King's servants in the hedges and highways ? Shall we enter the kingdom of God merely because we have believed the Gospel and been baptized ? Shall we be chosen merely because we have been called ? The answer of the parable is in harmony with Peter's exhortation to make our calling and election sure, which implies possible uncertainty. What is that answer ?

When the King came in to see the assembled guests, He found one without a wedding garment, and said unto him, " Friend, how camest thou in hither, not having on a wedding garment ? " This shows that something was implied in the invitation that was not expressed in the first instance. The invitation was, " Come to the feast." The implication was, " Come in a fit state." The King's question shows that every guest, though freely invited from the highways and the hedges, was required to come in a fit dress for the occasion. The man might have said, " I came because I was asked to come " ; but the King's question shows that he regarded the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

acceptance of the invitation as acceptance also of the implied conditions. Now let us come to the point. What are these implied conditions? What is this wedding garment? We ascertain from another figure of the same matter. The guests in their collective capacity are symbolized in the Apocalypse as a woman in white array—a bride in fine linen, clean and white. And concerning this white raiment it is added, "the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints" (Rev. 19 : 8). In the parable this principle is illustrated in its individual application. Each applicant for a place at the feast must possess the individual righteousness, without which no man shall enter the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6 : 9 ; Matt. 5 : 20).

Some escape this conclusion, deceiving their own selves by saying Christ will be their righteousness. Why was he not righteousness for the rejected guest? Why will he not be righteousness for false brethren who sow to the flesh, and to whom he tells us he will say, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity"? If a man have no righteous fruits of the Spirit to present before Christ in the account we must all give at his judgment-seat, when he judges the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom, the fate of the rejected guest will be his. "Cast out the unprofitable servant" (Matt. 25 : 30). Those who have to say they have no righteousness of their own, will find that Jesus will be nothing to them.

The sentiment that Christ's righteousness alone is to be the basis of our acceptance, is one of the countless and pernicious corruptions of clerical theology. It doubtless originated in the misapplication of a certain element of apostolic truth, namely, that which informs us that all are under sin, and that our salvation is not of works, but through the righteousness of faith that is in Christ. Men have long ceased to perceive that this principle applies only to unjustified sinners, and not to those who have been placed in a justified or forgiven position, through the obedience of faith. Christ is righteousness for sinners in this sense, that God offers to forgive them for Christ's sake, and to grant them a co-heirship with Christ, of what Christ, as a manifestation of God, has achieved for himself. But when sinners become saints, they come into relation to a new principle. They are responsible to him as servants to a master, and he will judge them according to their works (Rev. 2 : 23 ; Matt. 16 : 27 ; 2 Cor. 5 : 10 ; Gal. 6 : 8). If they bring forth fruits to the Spirit—that is, do and be what the Spirit in the word requires, they will receive everlasting life ; and if they bring forth fruits to the flesh—that is, be and do what the mere natural mind prompts a man to do, they will inherit corruption. So says the last testimony referred to. Hence it is that the apostles dwell so incessantly and so emphatically on the necessity for brethren to walk as saints, and to be on their guard against conformity to the world, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin (Heb. 3 : 13). If we present ourselves to Christ as one of the guests unprovided with that raiment of personal righteousness which he requires, we shall assuredly be rejected, and no man can learn what that personal righteousness is, so as to have it in continual available remembrance, except by the continuous and reverential study of the word of Christ contained in the writings of the apostles and prophets. Apart from this, a man with even a complete theoretical knowledge of Christ may become so infected with the spirit of the world around him, which also exhales so freely from his own heart, that while professing the name of

Christ he will walk in the flesh, having a name to live while utterly dead to the high things of God.

Most students of the word, in the early stage of their studies, fall into the mistake of supposing the "wedding garment" stands for baptism. If they pursue their studies to any practical effect, they by and by get rid of this mistake. They remember that many baptized persons will be rejected at the judgment seat, and that the most distinguished of the guests— "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets"—have never been baptized: in which case, if the "wedding garment" stood for baptism, we should have the anomaly of guests with wedding garments turned out, and guests without them allowed to remain. Besides, to what a cheap affair it would reduce the garment in question, and how out of harmony with the whole spirit of the divine economy, which lays such stress on persevering well-doing as a qualification for acceptance, and keeps in a comparatively minor place mere ceremonial compliances. Baptism is only the first act of obedience on the part of a believing sinner, and is of a nature with the kind of righteousness which the Pharisees performed when they circumcised children, and kept the feasts—all very essential in their place, but not accepted at the hands of otherwise unrighteous men. The law of admission to the kingdom says: "Except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of God" (Matt. 5 : 20). This is the righteousness typified by the wedding garment—"the righteousness of saints" in its fulness and ripeness, the unreserved and patiently-continued submission of enlightened men and women, in whose hearts faith fully dwells with purifying effect, working by love to the keeping of the commandments of God.

With this in view, the lesson of the parable is sobering and wholesome. It shows us that our mere acceptance of the Gospel will not suffice to save us. It shows us that there must be a clothing of the inner man with all those principles, precepts and affections which the Spirit has so abundantly stored for us in the word, and which we must procure from thence by diligent daily reading. These constitute the wedding garment, without which we are poor and miserable and wretched and blind and naked, even if we may be infatuated enough to suppose ourselves "rich and increased in goods, and in need of nothing." The fact helps us both to understand and rightly estimate the Spirit's invitation, "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and *white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed*, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear" (Rev. 3 : 18).

This Divine merchant has erected a house for the sale of His wares. In the Bible He has spread them out to view, and cries at the street corners: "Unto you, O men, I call; and my voice is to the sons of men. O ye simple, understand wisdom; and, ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart. Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things" (Prov. 8 : 4-6).

Those who respond to this call will experience the truth of the assurance that "Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding; for the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto

her. Length of days is in her right hand ; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Prov. 3 : 13-17). The experience of the goodness of divine wisdom begins even now in the constant satisfaction which springs from the answer of a good conscience towards God and towards man, and in the joyful hope of ineffable good, when the weary journey of this life shall have come to an end, as come it will. But what shall we say of that final form of the experience which will be the lot of those who shall be declared by Christ to have overcome and kept his works unto the end? Language simply fails to define and imagination to conceive it. We can simply say with David, "Oh how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up . . . for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!" The rebuke of His people will be taken away from all the earth. It will no longer be the portion of the sons of God to endure the quiet scorn of those whose portion is in this life, who dwell at ease, and are filled with substance, whose eyes stand out with fatness, and who have more than their hearts can wish. The sons of God will be in honour when the children of the flesh in all ranks of society shall have passed away, and become a mere memory. The sons of God are in heaviness for a season : but when their warfare is accomplished—when the fight is passed, they will receive the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness, and in the vigour of an immortal nature, rejoice evermore in the great joy which is the appointed portion of the accepted guests at the marriage of the King's Son. Well may it be said, "Blessed are they who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

Salt

The salt of the earth.—Savourless salt.—The people who answer to one and the other.—The salting process.—The light of the world.—Lit candles.—Keeping the light under a bushel.—Various kinds of bushels.—The business bushel.—The house bushel.—The shining of the light.—Christ the example.—The real source of spiritual weakness.—The neglect and the study of the word.—The effect of the one course and the other.—Christ in the day of his suffering.—The comfort we draw from the contemplation of it.—Failure and final victory.—Fellowshipping Christ now, and the joyful end.

JESUS said to his disciples, "Ye are the salt of the earth : but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is henceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men." And doubtless what he said of another saying is true of this : "What I say unto you I say unto all." Savourless salt is certainly a very useless kind of article to put on the table, and salt without savour is not a thing unknown, literally or metaphorically. We may know the truth and profess the truth, and not taste of it. This is a sore evil for all parties concerned. If our salt is without taste to the eater, the eater is not likely to give us a place at his table. We see this illustrated even now. We have to eat each other in a sense, for we cannot mingle together and talk with each other, and have transactions with each

other, without in some degree partaking of each other. The real taste of the individual is felt in these familiar relations of life. What a nauseating disappointment it is to find utter tastelessness in the man who comes to you labelled as the finest salt ! There are some in whom you feel no taste of the salt as you eat them. Some just barely taste of it. Others are nicely seasoned. It is a treat to get hold of them. Their name is not legion, but they are on the increase. There is no secret about the salting process. Those who are salt are so for one reason only, and that which makes them salt will make others salt also. They are salt because they *steep* in the salt. The continual reading of the word saturates their minds with the spirit of the word, and changes the insipid, purposeless old man of the flesh into a new man, full of interest and noble qualities. Jesus says his people are the salt. They are constituted so by the truth, which is the great salting influence, but, says he, if the salt becomes savourless, it will not be accepted. It will not be used on the King's table, but will be cast out as unworthy of any higher purpose than being strewn on the highway, to prepare a way whereon others may walk. Let us give earnest heed, then, to the salting process, "as new born babes desiring the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby." Jesus says further to his disciples, "Ye are the light of the world," and he says, "Men do not light a candle to put it under a table or under a bushel." The very object of lighting it is that people may see by means of the light. Now all who have heard or learned the truth by the word of the apostles, are so many candles lit by Jesus, for the apostles laboured as for Christ. Now, saith he, "Let your light shine before men." The meaning of this is free from doubt. Without giving it a specific application, we may take it to refer to every means by which the indwelling of the truth is evident in a man's life, and therefore as including what a man says and what he does. In speech and action, then, we are to let the truth be manifest. Some do and some do not this. Some have a bushel, and keep their light under it nearly all the time. Business, perhaps, is their bushel, and a very big bushel it is, and thick on the sides, so that the light cannot struggle through. There need not be a business bushel. Business is legitimate if kept in due subordination. There is a danger, however, of its weakening, if not destroying, the truth in the mind. It is liable so to absorb in either care or worldly zest, as to dim the sense of relationship to Christ, and secularize the mind and make us feel as citizens of the world and brethren of the cigar-puffing fraternity, who carry themselves with such odious pride and imagine themselves the important people of the earth, when they are nothing but a gang of heartless snobs, rousing heaven and earth to fill their unholy coffers with cankering gold ; whose end is to lie down with the beasts of the valley and to perish.

The truth does not shine from a man who is at home in that herd. Neither in his talk nor his doings is it manifest. His general life belies the good profession. You would not know but that he was a citizen of the world. You would certainly never imagine his citizenship was in heaven, or that he was acting as a steward of Jesus Christ. He is all bushel ; his candle, if lit at all, is a "light within," and gives no ray to guide the wanderer's feet to life eternal. But other things may act as a bushel quite as much as business. Domestic life may do it : there is nothing more likely to snuff out the light of heaven than the cares of house and family, if we do

SEASONS OF COMFORT

not resist them by continually remembering that here we have no continuing city; that this life is only truly useful when made the means of gaining the life to come ; and that, therefore, true wisdom consists in using all things as pilgrims use them, for present necessity, and not for entertainment, deferring the pleasures of life till the time when we shall drink of them without danger and without the admixture of alloy. There is scarcely anything to which we are related as mortal men in the present state of existence, but what, if we are not on our guard, will completely hide the light from view, both doctrinally and practically. Jesus would have us to be on our guard. Jesus would have us exhibit the light that is in us, and that too not in one particular way, but in all ways. Let there, of course, be doctrinal light. No good can be done without this. A thorough knowledge of the truth is indispensable to give a man a good start in spiritual matters. At the same time, let us not deal exclusively with the light in that particular form, because it ought equally to be seen in a man's action. It ought to be seen that he is influenced by the truth ; that he is a different man from what he was before ; that his schemes are different ; that the whole order of his life is shaped to a different pattern ; that all his actions and general manifestations of his character have been moulded and influenced by the knowledge of the Gospel. We ought in every sense to exhibit the light as he who was the light of the world did. He is our example—the first-born among many brethren—the forerunner—the chief. Whenever we want to test ourselves, or determine the particular line of conduct to pursue in reference to any matter, we cannot do better than look at him—the author and finisher of our faith, and ask ourselves what he would have done under similar circumstances. Our answer will always be ready to hand, for his life is detailed with very great minuteness in the four Gospels ; all we have to do is to become familiar with these details. The real source of the spiritual weakness is non-acquaintance with these. Let the word of Christ dwell richly, and there is power to overcome. And it is because people do not keep the company of the truth, that it fails to dwell richly. Let them keep its company, and they will by and by see and feel its reality. In plain English, let them give the study of God's book that place in the economy of their lives which they are commanded to do in those words of the Spirit by Solomon, which pronounce a blessing on the man who standeth daily at wisdom's gates, and waiteth at the posts of her doors ; who meditates, as David hath it, day and night on the law of the Lord, and whose delight is therein. Those who do not give the Word this place in their lives sin against themselves. They neglect that which is for their own benefit, for a man loses a great deal, even as regards the present experiences of life, who allows himself to omit the study of the Word from his daily programme. The study of the Word acts like oil upon the fretted waters. It soothes the nerves and imparts a healthy tone to the mind. The man who is not subject to its influence falls victim to those gnawing cares that beset life in every form as at present constituted. His mind falls a prey to worldly fever ; the moral fluids (if we may use such an expression) become dried up ; "vanity and vexation of spirit" is his bitter verdict on existence. The word of God cures all this ; it gives us a tranquillity and coolness of mind and clearness of understanding which helps us to keep the devils off, and to walk through this evil time comparatively unmolested. This enables us to emulate Christ,

who showed the light doctrinally and practically, being holy, harmless, undefiled—without sin.

The aspect in which we are especially called together to consider him, may be called the dark side of his great history. We are not so much to think of him as he will be revealed when he appears as the world's Conqueror and the believer's Redeemer, though that feature is not entirely absent from the symbols before us ; we are more particularly to go back to the time when he was despised and rejected of men—a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. It is good to go back to that time. We get both comfort and courage from the picture we see. Jesus as he now is—the Lord the Spirit, clothed with the ineffable glory of the Father—is high above us. We cannot reach to him in ready sympathy. We feel something of the awe felt by Abraham in the presence of the Elohim when he besought the Lord not to be angry at dust and ashes presuming to interrogate the Deity. But when we look upon him as he sojourned in the flesh, tempted in all points like as we are, and familiar in some degree with the weakness which bows us to the earth, we realize something of the sentiment expressed by Paul, when he says, "We have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities." We are comforted ; and our comfort is complete when we listen to the invitation : "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith" (Heb. 10 : 22). We rejoice at the invitation, and only mourn that our weakness hinders that ready response which the enlightened heart yearns to make. "All things are possible to them that believe," said Jesus to the man who asked him to have compassion on his child. We feel like the man who "straightway cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe ; help thou mine unbelief." The picture of our Lord's humiliation also inspires courage, for if we are unfashionable and poor, and subject to divers kinds of deprivations on account of our making the ancient Gospel and the ancient hope our object, we know that we are only having our turn of the very experience that embittered the earthly days of the Captain of our salvation ; and to take part in such a fellowship makes us bold. Do we not feel like Peter ? "Lord, I am ready to go with thee unto prison and unto death." Peter failed in the first trial ; but afterwards, he went both to prison and to death for Christ's sake, and was of those who "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." So must we, even should we quail at the first shock of battle, overcome at the last, and be found among those who earn the victor's crown, setting all foes and all consequences at defiance in our determination to walk in that path of faith and obedience that alone leadeth unto life. And if we gain comfort and courage from that eventful thirty-three years and a half that our Lord lived in the flesh, do we not gain light and wisdom for our present goings ? He "left us an example that we should follow his steps." What did he do ? How did he spend his time ? To what did he devote his life ? These are questions for us to consider. He went about doing good. He was an object of attraction even then. The people crowded to him wherever he went. We cannot hope to draw people as he drew them, but in a measure we can follow in his steps. We can take the lesson he gives us, and become "servants of all." We can make it our business to minister, instead of to be ministered unto. We can seek to "do good" ; to be "ready unto every good work," in our little way. It is not agreeable work except from the

dutiful point of view, but patiently continued in we shall have a full reward. Fellowshiping the sufferings of Christ we shall be invited into his joy. And oh, what joy ! Christ was an attraction in the day of his humiliation, but much more will he be an attraction in the day of his glory. He will be the blessing of God upon earth, and we shall be a blessing with him if he count us worthy of so great a fellowship.

Well, then, the contemplation of this picture, as a whole, is held up in the bread and wine. It is a beautiful picture, which we ought to study well. It ought to be photographed on our minds. Let Christ dwell in our hearts by faith ; let him become the highest idea and the strongest power in our mind. Let us rise to the position of Paul, who could say, " For me to live is Christ." This is a position all-glorious. There is nothing else worth living for ; all that we may achieve on our own account is not our own when done, because we have to die and leave it, whereas anything we achieve in Christ is eternal, because he is for ever. All things belong to Christ, and if we belong to him, then, as Paul says, all things are ours. Throw in then with Christ ; loosen your grasp on the present. " Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not." " Ye cannot serve God and Mammon." Only one thing we are permitted to seek with all our hearts at present, and that is, the kingdom of God. Of the other things, Christ says, " Take no thought for them ; your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of them." " Having food and raiment, be content." " They that will be rich," says Paul, " fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." The only safe rule of Christadelphian conduct, is Christ first and last.

Danger

Reproof.—Apostolic warnings.—Our dangers.—A form of godliness.—Seed and soil.—Fructification a question of conditions.—Failure.—Demas.—The pleasures of the world.—Temptations of the young.—Reasons for avoiding the pursuit of pleasure.—Christ and his brethren not of the world.—Reasons for this.—Not an overdrawn picture.—God rejected.—His purpose to bring about a change.—Preparing the instruments in the developing of the saints.—Their present position.—Their coming joy.

IN our readings this morning we have been informed that the Scriptures which are elsewhere declared to be for comfort and patience, are also profitable for reproof and instruction in righteousness. We have recently had occasion to look at the comfort in the glory of the prospect opened up before us in the Gospel. This is the bright side : today we glance at the dark side—that side, namely, that exhibits the position of saints in the present evil world—taking the word saints for present purposes, as including all upon whom the name of Christ is called without reference to whether they are faithful or otherwise. Here we shall find reproof and instruction in righteousness most salutary—most necessary. While in this position we are in danger. The greatness of the danger is evidenced in the constant

recurrence of the apostolic exhortation to be on our guard. "Beware, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." "Let us therefore fear, lest any should seem to come short." "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." "Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind." "Redeem the time because the days are evil." "Be ye holy in all manner of conversation." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world." "Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." Such are examples of the constantly recurring precepts of the Spirit to the saints in relation to their present position. They point to our danger, and danger calls for circumspection.

Let us look this morning at some of our dangers. The chapters read give us a clue. We read therein of some who were to be "lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God." The persons so described were not unbelievers: they were professors, for it is added that they had "*a form of godliness* but denied the power thereof." This is a graphic description. It sets forth exactly who is meant. It does not mean that the persons to whom it applies would deny there was a form of godliness, or reject the form. The word "deny" has the same force here as in the exhortation to believers to "*deny ungodliness and worldly lusts*," that is, put them away—have no part with them. Don't consent to them—deny them. The persons in question believed the Gospel in theory, and submitted themselves in form to its institutions, but there is a something in connection with these which they practically denied in not being influenced by it: "the power thereof." What is this?

If seed is put into the earth, and does not germinate, it has no "power" in the soil. It is powerless, and at last succumbs to corruption. This is a simile employed by Jesus himself, in reference to the word: the word is seed: our minds are soil: if the seed does not bring forth the results intended, we have the form without the power. As a rule, the failure of seed to germinate is due to some defect in the seed: in other cases the seed is good, but some one or more of the conditions necessary to its fructification are wanting. There is a lack of moisture, or the ground is too hard, or it is not sufficiently covered with soil. In the case of the seed of the word, there is no defect in the seed: failure in fructification must be due altogether to the surrounding conditions. These conditions are most of them subject to control. The quality of the soil cannot be altered: a man cannot by an act of will change himself at the start from being what he is, as regards natural capacity and proclivity, but he can regulate the external conditions which at last even affect the constitution of the mental soil to some extent. A piece of poor ground well cultivated will show a fair result, and even improve in quality, where good soil left untended will yield a crop of weeds, and deteriorate in its own constitution. The parallel in the case of mental tillage is perfect.

Certain conditions are essential to the fructification of the good seed sown in the heart, and other conditions are hurtful and will positively arrest growth at last and bring decay and death. The pursuit of pleasure is one of the latter conditions. It is mentioned in the chapter read: "lovers of pleasure" are the antithesis to "lovers of God." It is mentioned in other

SEASONS OF COMFORT

places. Paul speaks of certain female professors, who living in pleasure were "dead while they lived." The opposite condition is expressed as "living soberly, righteously and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope." Incidentally, we have a practical illustration of the two states in one of the chapters read. In the 10th verse (2 Tim. 4 : 10) Paul says, "Demas hath forsaken me, *having loved this present world.*" Two years before, in writing to Philemon, Paul describes this Demas as his "fellow labourer," and therefore a partaker of the sufferings that are incident in all ages in one form or other to those who identify themselves with the high calling of God which is in Christ Jesus. So that here is the case of a man, an actual companion of the apostles, turning aside from this cause, that he "loved this present world." Now this is an influence to which we are all, at all times, exposed. There are pleasures in the world. There is recognition, entertainment, society, merry-making, and honour for those whom the world loves, and these things make the time speed pleasantly away. Even for those that the world does not love, there are many pleasures provided, if people like to go in the way of them. There is a gratification to the natural mind in going with the multitude in the ways of pleasure. There is always a fascination about the thing, especially if it is "respectable," and engaged in as something about which the lovers of pleasure can say there is "no harm" in it.

The temptation to give in to this kind of seduction is liable to be felt in the loneliness, endurance and self-denial that belong to the present walk of fellowship with Christ. The temptation is especially felt by the young, who have not yet realized the hollow character of all the ways of man. They need especially to be warned, and if they are wise, they will listen. There are two strong reasons why they should listen—always pre-supposing that they have earnestly made Christ their portion, and not taken up with him merely because friends have done so. There are two things which make it impossible for those, whether old or young, who desire the approbation of Christ at his coming to indulge in the pleasures of the world, whether in the form of the ball-room, concert-hall, theatre, or any of the other devices which sinners have invented for the whiling away of their heavy hours.

The first is, these things are hurtful to the new man formed within them by the word : they check the fructification of the seed of the word. They hang a heavy weight on the spiritual racer : they help the sin which doth already too easily beset us : they tend to hold the mind in a carnal sympathy, and to keep at a distance the things of God. They make us feel one with the world, which is God's *enemy*. They are therefore a hindrance. They do not help us to Christ, but they rather widen the distance between us and him. Who has not at one time or other experienced the mental blank—the spiritual desolation—caused by the peculiar mental excitement called "pleasure" ? Therefore on the score of spiritual expedience, spiritual men and women (and none others are the children of God) should never be found in the paths of pleasure-seeking. They should be found taking care of the seed of the word that has been sown in their hearts. To follow pleasure is as if a man should water his garden with vinegar or lime water. Let him water it rather with the pure water of the word, and manure it with those self-restraints and sobrieties which will make it healthful and strong and vigorous.

But there is a stronger reason why we should "stand not in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of the scornful." It is one of the plainest teachings of Christ concerning himself and his brethren that they are "not of the world." By the world he does not mean the earth, or air, or sky; he means the people that inhabit the earth; the people who compose the present order of society. Not being of the world is a sufficient reason of itself why we should not be found consorting with the world in its particular pleasures and festivals. But we are expressly commanded to "love not the world." We are further informed that if in spite of this exhortation we do love the world and have its friendship, it will be at the price of God's friendship, for "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." There is substantial reason for the invitation to "come out from among them and be separate," that God may receive us, and that we may be His sons and daughters. That reason is the one given by John: "All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father": that is, these sentiments are not such as the Father approves as the motives of action in those whom He has formed in His own image. Now these feelings mentioned by John are the conspicuous features of every worldly gathering of pleasure-seekers, and of worldly people when they do not gather. When we attain to any growth in Christ, we see this clearly, and more clearly every year. At first, to youth and inexperience (and always to the carnal mind, whether old or young) it seems not so bad. Things seem fair and harmless, and the apostolic portraiture overdrawn, and the scruples of such as are guided by the apostles over strong. But at last, with maturer judgment of all things and enlarged appreciation of things that are truly "good," the world looks all that it is, and if we are wise, we stand aside as God's friends have always stood aside from the enemy of God. We get to see that the world in all its ways is wrong at the root. What root is that? God. The world sprang from God: and in a right state of the world, God would be its highest honour, its highest concern, its highest pleasure. But in the actual state of the world, God is not there at all. He is unknown, unregarded where professedly recognized, sneered at where not actually denied in words--blasphemed everywhere in the actions of men. His Word neglected where admitted, despised where not avowedly cast out, spurned and denounced where the carnal mind openly unfurls the flag of its rebellion. While casting God behind their backs, the world scruples not to use, as if it were its own, the goodness God has distributed with open hand on every side. It lays its hand on everything as if it were creator and lord of all. It puts itself in the place of God. The word tells us that for the pleasure of God creation exists. The world ignores this, and acts on the theory that all things are for the pleasure of man. Thus God is dethroned in His own house. God purposes a great change in this respect. He intends to humble the haughtiness of man, that the Lord alone may be exalted in that day. He intends to exhibit His glory to the eyes of all flesh, when, because of His judgments, all nations shall come and worship before Him. He will say, "Be still, and know that I am God, I will be exalted in the earth." The day is coming when one shall not say to his neighbour, "Know the Lord, for all shall know him, from the least even to the greatest." Every knee shall bow to Him, and every tongue confess.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Meanwhile He is making preparation for that day in the selection from men, by the preaching of the Gospel, of a family who shall shadow forth His glory, and execute His authority in the age to come. They are called to the fellowship of His Son, who is the first-born of the family, and their elder brother. This fellowship consists in walking as he walked (1 John 2 : 6), and being in the world as he was in the world (1 John 4 : 17), doing the will of the Father, and glorifying His name, even to the point of enduring the contradiction of sinners against themselves. Now shall these—the appointed executioners of divine vengeance on the world, the appointed reflectors of divine wisdom in the age to come, the appointed instruments of enlightenment and blessing to all mankind in the day of holiness to Jehovah—shall these be found consorting in the pleasure-seeking of a world that knows not God, and obeys not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ? Can the sons of God give countenance to assemblies and occasions in which God is dethroned, and pleasure placed on the seat of honour and power?

It is scarcely possible for a heart in true sympathy with God to falter in the answer to this question. David is a true instance of such a heart, and he says, "I have hated the congregation of evil-doers; I will not sit with the wicked." "I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers." Such will be the account that every faithful son and daughter of the Lord God Almighty will give of themselves. And what if such a course may bring present weariness (though a righteous man is less weary in solitude than in the crowd of those who set not God before them)? What if it shut you off from much that looks agreeable and entertaining and advantageous in the present time? The day that hastens is a day of great recompense for those who take up the cross and follow Christ. It is a day when the present evil world will be no more, when it will have passed like a dream, when the children of vanity shall lament in vain with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, mourners shall be comforted, and the despised shall be exalted. There is no human joy, and no earthly pleasure comparable to the joy and gladness that will electrify the ranks of those who shall come to Zion with singing, crowned with everlasting and unspeakable joy in the day when, for them, sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Signs and Traditions

The work of the apostles in the first century.—The position of believers then.—The same now in essence.—The signs of the times a mere accessory.—Mere prophetic politicianism an abomination.—True discipleship independent of signs though interested in them.—The characteristics of this discipleship.—No sensationalism or politic-mongering.—The joys and contemplations of the Spirit.—The right place for the “signs.”—Popular conceptions of well-doing misleading.—God’s requirements the only standard.—Scriptural principles never recognized.—The only safe rule, yet a peculiar danger in its application.—Making void the commandments by nullifying interpretations.—Sophistries of the enlightened traditionalists.—Illustrations.—Resist not evil.—Relieve the distressed.—Stand apart from the world.—Apologists for disobedience.—The test of obedience.—Its object in probation.—The time short.—The end glorious.

It is profitable to remember that the basis of our meeting this morning, and of all the meetings we hold, and the basis of our hope concerning the future, is the work of the apostles in the first century. Keeping this distinctly in view, we are able to judge our position scripturally, and to conform it to the right model in points where it may lack. As an ecclesia, or assembly of the called, we are acceptable to God through Christ, only in so far as we are what Paul laboured to make the ecclesias in his day.

He gives clear expression to his aim in this matter in the words found in 2 Cor. 11 : 2 : “I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy : for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.”

Let us try to imagine ourselves members of the community to which Paul addressed these words, and it will help us to realize our true position as brethren and sisters of the Lord Jesus. There was no drying Euphrates in those days ; there was no Eastern Question engaging the universal thoughts of men, and stirring actively the hopes of those looking for Christ. The hope of Christ’s appearing was before the minds of the brethren, but not as a matter of imminent expectation. Paul told them plainly, in writing to the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2 : 2), that that day would not come until the development and manifestation of the man-of-sin power, symbolized by the little horn of Daniel’s fourth beast. They had therefore none of the excitements that belong to the hope of Christ’s speedy reappearing. Their position was one of fidelity to Christ, based upon deeper and more lasting considerations.

The question we must address to ourselves is : Do we participate in their standing in this respect ? Is our position one of “repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ,” without reference to the sensationalism of public events ? It is to be feared that in some cases, at all events, the true answer would not be a satisfactory one. The nature of the times we live in exposes men more or less to the liability of being absorbed in the signs of the times from a merely political point of view, to the sacrifice of the real and lasting claims of the truth on their affections. There are, doubtless, cases in which the withdrawal of the political aspect of latter-day expectations, connected with Christ’s appearing, would leave

SEASONS OF COMFORT

the mind destitute of all interest in the purpose of God. It is for us seriously to examine ourselves on this point. Mere prophetic politicianism would be no qualification for association with Christ in the day of his appearing. The preparation of the bride for union with her Lord consists of something much higher than acquaintance with the political symptoms of his approach. This acquaintance is, of course, a characteristic of true disciples living in our period of the world's history ; but it is outside the essence of true discipleship. True discipleship existed vigorously in the days of the apostles, when as yet the signs of the times, in some of their details, had not been revealed. It is to this class of discipleship that we must conform, if the advent of Christ is to be of any advantage to us. This discipleship, while greatly interested in the signs of the times, is independent of them for its existence. Its life is drawn from sources deep and lasting as the universe itself. It depends not for its warmth and activity upon the transient phases of God's political work among the sinners of the earth. The basis of its vitality and its love is broad as the whole work of God, from the day that Adam left the garden in sorrow. It is substantial and deep as the history of Israel spread over the centuries to our own day. It is lively and real, as the power and wisdom of the God of Israel. And true and permanent as the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only abiding fact in human history, though men see him not yet.

There is a present life in true discipleship which contrasts strikingly with the state of mind which lives only on the sensations of expectation. We see the features of this life reflected in all the writings of Paul and David by the Spirit. God is an every-day fact in such a life. To thank Him and praise Him and trust Him are its every-day exercises and luxuries. Christ is a reality in such a life, as the priest who ever liveth to make intercession for us, and who is able to save to the uttermost all those who come unto God by him. His mastership is recognized every moment, and wisdom sought in doing his commandments. Joy is experienced in the contemplation of his excellence, and sobriety and purification acquired in the realization of his holiness. Prayer and meditation in solitude are the natural reliefs of a life based on these foundations ; and the benefit of others in temporal ministrations and the work of the truth, its congenial expression. All pleasure-following, and politician-mongering are alike foreign to its vital bent. It finds adequate sphere in the jog-trot monotony of everyday life, enduring as seeing Him who is invisible, and "choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season."

The signs of the times, to a mind modelled thus after the image of the new man in Christ, afford gratification, but do not supply motive. The motive exists independently of them. It is drawn from the fact of God's proprietorship of all things, and His purpose disclosed in the Gospel, to glorify His name on the earth and abolish all curse by Christ. Indications of the near approach of the fulfilment of this purpose are reviving and stimulating to those who are the subjects of this motive ; but they are not essential to its life or continuance. Abraham and all the prophets walked acceptably before God under its power, while seeing the day afar off ; consequently, their true children are everywhere characterized by a patient and warm-hearted continuance in well-doing, without respect to the tokens in the political sky.

In our conceptions of well-doing we must beware of being guided by popular standards, whether in religious or secular circles. Polite society embodies the mind of the flesh in its precepts and practices ; and religious society, where it is to be found, is, as a rule, but the organic manifestation of superstition, originating in the long established apostasy from apostolic principles, which occurred in the first century. We must draw our inspiration from one source only. There is no safety outside the oracles of God. The well-doing that is acceptable to God consists of the doing of those things He has required, and we cannot in our age learn what these things are otherwise than by the study of the book where they are recorded. We cannot learn them from the common talk and the current thoughts of society. Men have long since gone away from the Bible in this matter. In fact, the world at large never have at any time received and practised Scripture principles. The beginning of things was barbarism, and the present situation of things is but the adaptation of barbarism to the new circumstances created by the State adoption of a form of Christianity. Some Bible principles are to be found in contemporary recognition ; but these are only such as are common, more or less, to all forms of civilization. Not to steal and not to lie, are maxims which even the Pagans delighted to honour. True Bible principles go much higher and deeper than the so-called morality of popular discourse. They are scattered thickly all over the surface of Bible composition, and many of them are such as the most cultivated morality of the natural mind cannot receive. The keeping of the commandments of God, because they are His commandments, is a rule of action out of the reach of the natural man : yet it is the simplest rule in the household of God—one of the first of first principles. There is no safety for any of us apart from the adoption and practice of this simple principle.

There is, however, one peculiar danger which has to be guarded against in the matter. It is illustrated in what has been read this morning from the words of Christ to Israel after the flesh. He told them they had made void the commandments of God through their tradition. He makes his meaning plain by giving an illustration. Moses had enjoined the reverence and support of father and mother. To this the Jewish Rabbis had not a word of objection. They boasted in the law, and therefore in all parts of the law. They did not dare to say parents were not to be honoured and maintained by their children. Nevertheless, they took the pith out of the precept by adding to it a notion of their own on the subject. They taught that a man by a large gift to the Temple, might redeem himself from the obligation to maintain his parents, and thus they made void the commandment through their tradition.

This is the danger to which we in another form are exposed. Jesus has said, "Ye are my friends if ye keep my commandments," and he gives us to understand that by these commandments he means those delivered by his apostles as well as those spoken by himself. Now there is not much danger of our objecting to any of the commandments of Christ in a direct and formal way. We may, as the Scribes and Pharisees did with Moses, make a boast of Christ and our submission to him ; at the same time like them we may make void the commandments we confess by the traditions we invent. This is not an imaginary supposition. Christ has forbidden us to resist evil, or recover again the goods that may be taken away from us

SEASONS OF COMFORT

(Luke 6 : 30). To this the traditionists do not object directly : but they say duty to society requires the prosecution of the thief. The application of this doctrine makes it impossible that there can ever come a time for Christ's commandment to be obeyed. Consequently, it is a tradition making void his commandment. Christ has commanded the relief of all need that may come under our notice, and the Samaritan-like interesting of ourselves in the distress of those who have no claim on us. The traditionists say, "Very good, a noble precept" ; but in practice they hold that it is encouraging pauperism to entertain the cry of the needy, and that "every place should maintain its own poor." Consequently, when the opportunities arise for obeying the commandments of Christ, their tradition comes in to make it void, and they shut up the bowels of their compassion, and shutting their ear to the cry of the poor, depart to their inglorious comfort : forgetting to fear the time that will come, when it may be said to them : "Thou in thy lifetime hadst thy good things, and thy brother his evil things ; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." Again, Christ has forbidden the encouragement of friendship with the world, and declared the impossibility of retaining the friendship of God and the friendship of the world at the same time. The traditionist who loves the present world, comes in with a tradition to the effect that too much isolation of society narrows a man's opportunities of serving the truth, and that if the world can see that we are good fellows, they will be more likely to listen to what we have to say for Christ. The obedience of this tradition draws a man into association with the lovers of pleasure, and a participation in their pursuits, with the result of a friendship which takes away all meaning from the words of Christ, making void his commandment.

Illustrations might be multiplied, but these must suffice on the present occasion. No form of disobedience is so dangerous as that which is proposed under the plea of doing good. It is an old doctrine, "Let us do evil that good may come." Paul himself had to oppose it in his day, and his verdict on its advocates is vigorous and unmistakable : "Whose damnation is just." Such apologists for disobedience are far more dangerous than those who oppose Christ out and out ; for they may beguile the unwary to their destruction. A knowledge of Christ, and a profession of subjection to him will be of no ultimate value to us, if it turn out that through the power of our traditions we are living in daily disobedience of his commandments.

The course of obedience may be trying to the flesh and blood. It is intended to be so. No test of our faith could be more complete or beneficial than the command to do things contrary to our natural inclinations, and which there is no reason for doing but the simple one that they are commanded : but if the trial is heavy, the prize of victory is beyond our power to estimate. And our trial is only short at the longest. It will soon be over, even if we live the full age of man. A human lifetime is not even a tick on the clock of eternity, and when past, it is past never to return. Well therefore may we accept whatever portion of the suffering of Christ comes to us through the obedience of his commandments. Well may we say with him, "The cup which my Father has given me to drink, shall I not drink it ?" If we suffer with him we shall reign. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Walking Worthily

Paul's exhortation to walk "worthy of God."—"Harping" on the subject.—The matter in the nineteenth century.—Our moral relation to God and the world.—Things to be "constantly affirmed," and things not to be.—What it is to walk worthy of God.—Dangerous sophistries on the subject.—Two schools.—Men and God.—The flesh and the Spirit.—What the Spirit has to say on the subject.—Taking up the cross.—The voice of the Shepherd.—The spirit of Christ.—What it is in contrast to the spirit of the world.—The heart in the right place.—Principles unchanged in the nineteenth century.—Christ's coming to destroy the world.—The position of his brethren meanwhile.—The sort of men Christ wants.—Our dangers.—Urgent words, but kind.—The judgment of God impending.—Men barbarous towards God though civilized among themselves.—The example of Jerusalem.—Obedience without the spirit of obedience.—A common mistake about the Mosaic law.—The Gentiles worse than Israel 1,800 years ago.

PAUL tells us, in 1 Thess. 2 : 11, what he did when among the brethren in Thessalonica. "Ye know," he says, appealing to their memory, "how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, *that ye would walk worthy of God*, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory." What Paul did at Thessalonica, he did among the brethren everywhere else, of course ; and, if he were with us, he would do the same thing here. He would charge us to "walk worthy of God," and he would do it constantly. He would not be content to lay down our duty clearly at the start, and then go on, taking it for granted ; he would "harp" on the subject constantly. At least, this is what he did at Ephesus. His own testimony is this : "Ye (Ephesians) know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons. . . . Therefore watch, and remember that by the space of three years *I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears*" (Acts 20 : 18, 31).

What Paul did himself he told Timothy to do after him : "Be instant in season, out of season ; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine" ; and so to Titus he says : "*These things I will that thou affirm constantly*" (Titus 3 : 8).

What he advised Timothy and Titus to do in the first century, he would recommend everyone taking hold of the word to do in the nineteenth ; for the work is the same and its difficulties are the same now as then, though the form of surrounding circumstances has changed. The work now, if a work is doing, is the work in which Paul and others were engaged—the work of taking out and purifying a peculiar people for Christ ; and the principal difficulty springs now, as then, from the almost unconquerable bias of the human mind in favour of the present evil world.

What phase of the truth of Christ is it that requires to be the subject of this constant inculcation which Paul exemplified ? Let the epistles of Paul supply the answer ; for what Paul did by word of mouth, we have here illustrated by the pen. It is the question of our moral relation to God and our moral relation to the wicked world in which we live that supplies the chief material of his discourse. There are things that there is no need to "affirm

constantly." We do not need to "affirm constantly" that there is a God. We do not need to affirm constantly that man is mortal. We do not need to affirm constantly that Christ is the manifestation of God, and that the kingdom of God will be established on the earth. These things have, of course, to be kept constantly prominent in the presentation of the truth to a fluctuating audience of strangers; but so far as the brethren are concerned, they are in the position of foundations—under the house and out of sight. Once intellectually perceived as the teaching of the word, they are easily retained; and become weakened instead of strengthened by constant affirmation. But it is not so with the class of things which Paul made the subject of his entreaties among the brethren at Ephesus, night and day, for three years: these are easily forgotten. The tendency of the natural man is against the memory and the practice of them. Danger is constant, and, therefore, warning needs to be constant also.

The thing that Paul would always exhort us to do, if he were among us, would be to "walk worthy of God." This defines the matter comprehensively; presents it clearly, and fixes its character unmistakably. Need we be at a loss to decide our course, as saints, if we remember that it is to be "worthy of God"? The application of this single test will always, with an earnest man, easily settle controversies on practical questions which men of another type find enveloped in fog. Even earnest men need to apply it energetically. The desire to protect the interests or secure the honours of the present life, is liable to mystify a man's reason when they are interfered with by obligations that appertain to the house of Christ. It is a dangerous sophistry that tries to make the path of wrong appear right, or a little less dangerous than the word represents it to be. This is a sophistry of which we are all in danger, because the love of the present world is innate, and is liable to lead us to favour a loose construction of the commandments of Christ, which is the first step to ruin.

It is not for us to trust ourselves in deciding what sort of a walk is worthy of God. We must be guided solely by what is revealed. We are safe in taking the cue from the Scriptures. We are in danger if we trust to our own thoughts, and still more so if we yield to the sentiments current in society. Here we have to wage a constant war, in which we ought to make victory our strenuous aim. It is a warfare in which he only that overcomes will obtain the benefit. To be overcome here is to lose all. Men have certain notions how we ought to think, how we ought to talk, how we ought to use our leisure, how we ought to use our money and our abilities, how we ought to carry ourselves in society, and what we ought to aim at. This is one school, large, flourishing, and popular. The Spirit of God, by the apostles and prophets, has promulgated another set of notions on these subjects. This is another school, which is the opposite of prosperous at present. The two schools are incompatible. We cannot belong to both. It is Jesus who has said, "No man can serve two masters."

In this matter the world is one master and teacher, and the Spirit of God another. Our leaning to the one or the other is of vital importance. Paul thus sharply defines it: "*As many as are led by the Spirit of God, THEY ARE THE SONS OF GOD.*" Our standing before God depends upon whether we are led by the Spirit of God or the spirit of the world. A man led by the Spirit thinks and acts in harmony with the Spirit as our instructor in

the word. He may not do this all at once, but if he progress in the Spirit's tuition, he will come to it, and find himself the subject of a process of transformation which ends in making "a new creature." To reach this conclusion, however, he must submit himself to the Spirit's influence in the way the Spirit has appointed. The Spirit has given us the word as the means by which its mind is to be learnt; and it has given us this word in such a form that this "mind of the Spirit" cannot be apprehended apart from a constant and diligent perusal of the word containing it. "Here a little, and there a little, line upon line, and precept upon precept," is the principle of its construction. Its wisdom is diffused over all its contents. It is not concentrated anywhere. In this respect it is unlike a human composition which, in chapters and sections, aims at exhausting a particular topic. It is like the inner curtain of the Mosaic tabernacle: the blue and the purple and the fine-twined linen and the golden thread are everywhere through the fabric. It is, however, unlike that fabric in this, that in some parts of it you find treasure not to be found in other parts. This peculiarity has two results: to acquire the mind of the Spirit revealed in the word, we must make ourselves acquainted with the whole, and the reading of it is a constant feast. It never loses its relish, but becomes sweeter to the taste with use. In this it is unlike all other books.

Its delineation of a walk that is "worthy of God" is clear and reasonable and satisfactory. Let us look at it. It deals with the state of the affections and the nature of actions. It lays hold of both, and dictates certain important rules. In both departments it claims that we be conformed to its standard. It has something to say to us as to what we are to love and not to love, as well as telling us what we are to do and what we are not to do. It demands of us that we love certain things, and love not other things. It says: "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." These are divine specifications. Of what avail will our knowledge of the truth be if we fail in these essentials of true saintship? Jesus spoke with a meaning when he said, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." It would seem from the sentiments of some as if the doctrines of Christ, theoretically accepted, were all—as if a man might be a lover of pleasure and a follower of Christ at the same time—as if there was no such thing as self-denial, no such thing as offering our bodies living sacrifices, no such thing as strangers and pilgrims, passing the time of our sojourning here in fear. We must be on our guard against the influence of those who come to us with the name of Christ on their lips, but with a denial of Christ in their lives. The saints of God are not of this world, either in speech, pleasure, policy or action. Christ is their type, and Paul their pattern by Christ's appointment (1 Tim. 1:16). Christ and Paul are the lead which they follow, as Paul exhorted: "Be ye followers of me, as I am also of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). The joint voice of Christ and Paul his apostle is the voice of the Shepherd, than which they will hear no other.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

The spirit of Christ is the spirit of every true saint, and it is written that if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his. The spirit of Christ is one thing and the spirit of the world quite another. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of zeal for God ; the spirit of the world has no God in it. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of obedience ; the spirit of the world is a spirit of defiance against all submission. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of engrossing interest in the purpose of God in the earth and His will among men ; the spirit of the world is a spirit of total indifference to these, as if they had no existence. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others ; the spirit of the world is a spirit of self-ministration, self-protection and self-avengement. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of prayer and a spirit of compassion ; the spirit of the world is the opposite of these. The spirit of Christ is a spirit of sorrow, a spirit of walking with God, a spirit of standing apart from the world, a spirit of praying not for the world, a spirit of holiness, a spirit of faith, a spirit of chaste and dignified and pure speech ; while the spirit of the world is a spirit of jollity, a spirit of standing far off from God, a spirit of being of the world and with the world, a spirit of insensibility to righteousness, a spirit of unbelief, a spirit of ribald talk and effervescent folly. The two spirits are incompatible, and the two peoples are incompatible, and it is no use trying to act the part of both. It cannot be done ; it is a moral impossibility. The man who thinks he can do it is deceiving himself, and will find, like another professor, that he has "neither part nor lot in the matter." We are not to go out of the world, but while, of necessity, living therein, we are to keep ourselves unspotted in not partaking of the evil that is in it. Christ and the apostles have shown us how this is to be done, and, surely, no man is so unwise as to think he can show a better way.

To "walk worthy of God," then, is first to have the heart where Christ's heart was, and then to let the words of our lips and the deeds of our hands follow suit. Christ's heart was fixed on the Father and the Father's will, and the Father's work and the Father's purpose in the days to come. He had no other interest, no other love, though this, indeed, truly comprehends all interests and all love. The world hated him : how could it do otherwise ? He testified of it that its works were evil. The world did not hate his brothers, because they bore no such testimony, but were content to earn the good graces of the world by a friendly deference to what was going on around them. They joined in that receiving honour one of another which Jesus declared to be the great stumbling-block to faith in his day (John 5 : 44), and which continues to be the characteristic of the enemy of God to this. Have principles changed with the lapse of eighteen centuries ? Nay, verily. The world is the same, as we sadly find, and Christ, though we see him not, is the same yesterday, today, and for ever. He comes anon to deliver from the present evil world such as, like himself, are not of it, but who call on the Father, who, without respect of persons, will judge according to every man's work. The Lord's choice will rest on those who devote themselves to the doing of the will of his Father : so he often declared on earth. The will is that we make no friendship with a world which is full of everything contrary to His mind ; but that standing apart from it, we shine as lights in it, testifying against it, and leaving its pleasures, its honours, its politics and its wars to its own children, in whom

He has no delight. His intention is to destroy the system of things that goes to make up the world in its present constitution. The coming of Christ is to take vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 1 : 8). These words are not written in vain. The purpose of God is to destroy the world as it now is, and to establish a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Shall we build that which God means to destroy ?

Paul warned the brethren night and day with tears : do we need the warning less ?

Rather do we not stand in more imperative need of it ? An apostasy of centuries has trampled the whole system of divine ideas in the dust, and there is a danger that with nothing but the written word to reclaim us from the abounding darkness, we may receive an inadequate impression of what is required of us. There is danger that we may stop short at the beggarly idea that sonship to God consists of knowing the nature of man and the purpose of God, and being baptized and breaking bread. There is danger of our failing to see that Christ wants men with whom he will be the ruling affection, and with whom the love of God prevails unto sanctification and separation from a world that knows not God and obeys not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is a danger of our being content with the external compliances of sainship, having a name to live while dead, professing to be Christ's while remaining in league with the world for which he did not pray, and which he will shortly destroy, and us with it, if we make ourselves of it. No wise man will be content in this matter with anything short of the genuine apostolic ideal. It is better to leave the truth altogether alone than to profess it in a half-hearted way, which, while sufficient to spoil the present for us, will fail to secure the future. It is better, in this matter, to burn our boats, like the Roman general, and leave no retreat.

These urgent words will seem kind words by and by. The judgments of God are impending over this generation. The world is divinely declared to be ripe for them. It does not appear so to such as judge after the flesh : that is, who judge it in the light of human thoughts. To them, the world appears tolerably well-conditioned in moral matters. With so much church and chapel-going and charity money-spending and education-promoting and scientific nature-investigating, the world in such eyes appears righteous. They forget that righteousness is a matter of divine estimation, and that the first principle of righteousness relates to men's attitude to God—God the first and last, and who will yet be all in all upon earth as now among the angels. Men may be very civilized one to another and very barbarous towards God. Judgment came on Jerusalem 1,800 years ago, not because there was any lack of mutual deference or refinement, or alms-giving or prayer-saying, or synagogue-attending or knowledge-cultivating. The sacrifices were offered according to the law and the feasts held in their appointed seasons, actually with more regularity than they had been at any former period in their history. But the true fragrance was wanting. Sincere recognition of God had ceased. The charge made by Daniel against Belshazzar had become applicable to the Jewish nation : "The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified." The things they did—the performances they went through, the alms they gave, the prayers they offered, the public services they held—

were all done for man's sake and not for God's sake : so that God's own appointments became an abomination to Him, as saith the Spirit by Isaiah : " Incense is an abomination unto me ; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with : it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth." The state of mind in which the law was obeyed was the principal part of the service required. It is a common mistake to suppose that the law was limited to external compliances. Moses, on the contrary, spoke to them at the beginning thus : " And now Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul ? " (Deut. 10 : 12). The very essence of all the service of the law was the fervent recognition and intelligent service of the Creator and Proprietor of all things : but this had vanished from all but a few, and the body politic of Israel was a spiritual corpse. So it is in our day with the Gentiles, and worse ; for with the Jews there was, at least, the form of the institutions which God Himself had appointed, but among the Gentiles there is not even the form of godliness as originally delivered by the hands of the apostles. The doctrines of Jesus are not to be found in the pale of the dominant churches, and the institutions practised are not of his appointment. Add to this the prevalence of unfaith, insensibility to all divine relations and universal disobedience of the commandments of God, and we get some glimpse of a state of things which is divinely declared to be a ripe harvest of wickedness. From this state of things we are labouring to be delivered, and for the accomplishment of this object it is necessary now, as in the first century, to iterate incessantly the instructions and warnings that tend to the purification of the house of God.

The Prosperity of the Wicked

A difficulty, a mystery.—The prosperity of the wicked.—David's, Jeremiah's, and Habakkuk's thoughts about it.—An explanation.—But worse first.—The horse-running and Jordan-swelling age.—The end nearly reached.—The wicked only for a season.—The consolation of the righteous in all ages.—Abraham, Israel, Hannah, Daniel.—Christ's joy.—His consolation to his disciples.—Paul's words the same.—The promise through John in Patmos.—The war of Armageddon and the result.—An obvious and complete answer.—The prosperity of the wicked will end.—Apparent slowness.—The Lord not slack concerning His promise.—A necessity for deferring of judgment.—A plan great and wise.—A consolation not to be forgotten.—A good part to be chosen at the sacrifice of other things.—Laying aside every weight.

IN the portion read from the prophets this morning, we find expression given to the thoughts that must, at one time or other, exercise every lover of righteousness. More than this, we get the divine rejoinder to the thoughts expressed, and thus through Jeremiah (12) we enjoy the great comfort of communion with God on the subject, and are helped to rest in the day of

evil. Jeremiah says : " Righteous art thou, O Lord, when I plead with thee : yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments." As much as to say, " I wish to have some explanation of a matter which is apparently inconsistent with what I know of thy righteousness." " Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root ; they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit." This is the very picture we see around us—a picture liable to depress and even stagger, apart from the explanation of the case—a picture of men established in wealth, health, influence, and authority, who neither fear God nor regard man ; a picture in which the meek among men go to the wall, their righteousness a cause of poverty and contempt, and in which God appears to take no notice, and to make no interference on behalf of His dishonoured Name. This state of things distressed the Psalmist. He says, " I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death : but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men ; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain ; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness : they have more than heart could wish." Habakkuk expresses the same anxiety on the prosperity of the lawless : " Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? and makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag : therefore they rejoice and are glad."

We often may be distressed with the same situation of things. It is a comfort to know that we have such company in our distress as David, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, of whose experience the Psalms are an inspired reflex. But it is a great comfort to know that there is an explanation to this distressing state of things. Let us look at the explanation this morning, and let us indulge in the delicious prospect in connection with it, that that state of things will as assuredly pass away as night vanishes before the morning, and that, in due time, righteousness and praise will spring forth before all nations.

Let us first look at the answer that Jeremiah receives. It is not, at the first sight, comforting : " If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?" This was as much as to say that worse was coming. Jeremiah was distressed to see the wicked and the treacherous in prosperity among Jehovah's own people in Jehovah's own land ; but this was but as the running of footmen to the race of horses. A more terrible triumphing of the wicked was coming, foreshadowed in the intimation, " I have forsaken mine house . . . I have given the dearly beloved of my soul into the hand of her enemies." That more terrible triumph came in due course. The enemies of Israel poured into the land like a flood and banished the very form of all divine institutions from the earth. The times of the Gentiles set in with all the terrible vigour implied in the question addressed to Jeremiah. They have prevailed during the long succession of dark ages ; and the night still broods over

SEASONS OF COMFORT

all the earth. The horse-running and Jordan-swelling age is not yet over, and the panting Jeremiahs are sore pressed with the triumph of the wicked. But there is good hope in the situation. The morning is at hand. The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. The time for prosperous wickedness has nearly run its course. The war of the great day of God Almighty will break in pieces the power of all nations. In these, the days of the voice of the seventh angel, the mystery of God shall be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets. This we know by the later information vouchsafed to John in Patmos. Then shall we see the joyful gathering from all directions of the many of different ages past, whose part it will be to sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of God. Jeremiah will then no longer have to reason with God as to the meaning of His ways with man. "The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance; he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous; verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth."

In view of this consummation, the direct answer to Jeremiah's lamentation about the wicked being apparently planted and rooted in the earth, is to be found in the word written in Isaiah 40: "Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown; yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: Jehovah shall blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble." Their being planted and sown is only an appearance. They are planted and sown and established for the time being, but only as the vegetation of a season. When the season is over they will be sought for in vain. This has been the comfort of the saints in all ages. It was the promise made to Abraham, that his seed should possess the gate of his enemies; it was the prophecy by Balaam that a star should come out of Jacob and a sceptre out of Israel, which should have dominion, and should destroy the children of the enemy. It was the song of Hannah in the days of the Judges, that the adversaries of the Lord should be broken to pieces, and that Jehovah should exalt the horn of His Anointed, and judge the ends of the earth. It was the consolation of David, that his throne should be established for ever, and that evil-doers should be cut off, when those who wait upon God shall inherit the earth; yea, saith he, "When the wicked spring as the grass, and all the workers of iniquity do flourish, it is that they shall be destroyed for ever." All the visions of Daniel are to the same purport, as witness the splendid image of the king's dream, crumbled to powder under the stone, although made apparently of materials that could not be ground to powder. The terrible monster of Daniel's own vision meets destruction at the hands of the Ancient of Days, and is given to the burning flame. The prophecy of the seventy weeks is accompanied with an intimation of Roman triumph, only until "that which is determined shall be poured upon the desolator." The vision of the ram and the goat finishes with the intimation that the Gentile adversary of Israel shall finally be "broken without hand," while the concluding vision of the time of the end glows with the brightness of the great Prince that standeth for the children of Daniel's people, at whose head the Gogian confederacy comes to its end, with none to help.

And what shall we say of the fulness of the light that came with the age which witnessed the production of the New Testament? Jesus rejoiced in

Spirit when, looking forward, he beheld the Satan as lightning fall from the heavens of exaltation and power. "Woe unto you," said he, addressing the Satan class of his day, "ye have received your consolation : woe unto you that are full, for ye shall hunger ; woe unto you that laugh now, for ye shall mourn and weep." And comforting his own disciples, he said that they should weep and lament, and the world should rejoice. "But your sorrow shall be turned into joy ; I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." Let us hear also the consolation by the mouth of Christ's special messenger to the Gentiles, whom He gave to us for a pattern to all who should after him believe on Christ to life eternal : "God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" (Rom. 16 : 20). "God shall recompense tribulation to them which trouble you ; and to you who are troubled, rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven" (2 Thess. 1 : 7). "God will render unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile" (Rom. 2 : 8).

When we come to the last communication of Christ to his friends, we find all these things brought to a brilliant focus. In his revelation to John in Patmos, he tells us that he has received from the Father the commission expressed in Psalm 2 : 9 : "Thou shalt break the nations with a rod of iron ; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." The execution of this work he expressly promises to share with those who are faithful to him, saying : "To him that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations : and he shall rule them with a rod of iron ; and as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers : even as I have received of my Father." He exhibits to us in advance the spectacle of the collision which results in this catastrophe to the power of the enemy. He shows us "the kings of the earth and their armies" on the one side, gathered together against himself and "those that are with him," on the other ; and he tells us of the victory which remains with the latter in "the war of the great day of God Almighty." He shows us in dragon-symbol the power of the enemy chained and imprisoned ; the wine-press of God's indignation against the world, trodden by himself in terrible works of judgment, and all the kingdoms of the world become the kingdoms of Jehovah and His Christ, and their glorious possession by the saints who live and reign with him a thousand years and beyond.

The answer to Jeremiah's question is therefore obvious and complete. He did not receive that answer in the fulness in which we possess it, nevertheless he had it with sufficient definiteness for the day of his need. We have the answer more abundantly, because our need is greater in a day when God holds His peace as appointed, and when there are no visible tokens of His presence. The answer is plain and strengthening, so that he who readeth may run with patience the toilsome race set before him in the Gospel. That answer is, that in a time appointed the prosperity of the wicked will come to an end, when there will be no more need to ask the question which distressed Jeremiah. There is great need to emphasize this fact, both for the encouragement of those who have set their hope in God, and the warning of such as are liable to weary in well-doing. God Himself says, "Say ye to the righteous that it shall be well with him, for they shall eat

SEASONS OF COMFORT

the fruit of their doings" (Isa. 3 : 10). The deferring of this dispensation of judgment may weary, but it cannot alter the reality of the fact when it shall come. On this point the word speaks to us comfortably, thus : " Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is set in them to do evil. Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know it shall be well with them that fear God."

It is against this apparent slowness in the execution of the Divine decrees that we have to fortify ourselves. We must remember what Peter says : that the Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness ; a thousand years with Him are as a watch in the night, to use the expression of Moses ; and as one day, according to Peter. What we have to do is to wait in patient obedience all the days of our appointed time. We must not forget how much reason there is in it. Judgment, which was to include ourselves and all who have gone before us, could not take place in the days of Adam, nor of David, nor of Christ. It was needful that God should appoint a day when all His servants should be vindicated and glorified together ; and the fixing of this day involves the deferring of all judgment till then. Let us not be little children and murmur at the delays of wisdom.

Not only the delay of judgment, but the triumph of ungodliness in the earth is a necessary preparation for the results involved in that judgment. For how could we be exercised in faith and patience, and how could the unspeakable joy of release from the present evil world be prepared for us, without that very planting and prosperity and establishment of the wicked which distressed Jeremiah, and which will wring groans from the pilgrim's breast till the very hour of the avengement ? The plan is great and wise, and only becomes the more apparently so to every effort of enlightened reason. This is the case even when we confine our view to man's side of the question only, but how greatly is our perception of the matter quickened when God's side of the case is taken into account. The earth and its inhabitants are His, and He has made them for His pleasure. His holiness and His majesty are ineffably exalted beyond our conceptions, yet His will has been violated and set aside in the history of mankind. It is of His own pure beneficence that there is any arrangement at all for a rectification of the mischief that has come from this rebellion. That there should be slowness in the development of this arrangement is not for created man to complain of ; rather is it for us to rejoice and give praise that in the good pleasure of His own will He hath purposed in the ages to come to show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.

The one danger to which we are exposed is the liability to forget the consolation applicable to the sorrows of the new man in Christ Jesus. It is consolation that may be called far-fetched in more ways than one, but it is the consolation in which God has been pleased to exercise His children in the cloudy and dark day of their probation. It is a consolation only to be found in the word of His testimony, and it requires to be constantly renewed. Our knowledge of the consolation today will not serve for next week's conflict. Our minds are forgetful even of human things, and much more of those thoughts and ways of God which are so much higher than our own ways and thoughts, therefore our poor memories have to be continually

refreshed. Our special danger is that we may not feel the need of this refreshment. The lust of other things enters in and chokes the word. There are many objects of interest and affection in the economy of our present life, and between these and the natural mind, which is nearly omnipotent with us all at the start, there is almost the affinity of chemical force. When we give place to those things the mind is pleased and entertained, and as the entertainment has its source in human ways and present things, there is not only no need felt for the consolations of the word, but a feeling of aversion is liable to spring up towards them. The Scriptures have to do with divine ways and future things, and are therefore liable to lose their interest for those whose affections are not set upon these. This is at one time or another the case with us all, and here we must fight and conquer, or be conquered. In the course of daily life there are things we can choose to have to do with, or let alone. Paul recognizes this in advising us to lay aside every weight ; that is, everything that will act as a drag in the race we are running for eternal life. Some do not choose to lay them aside, but cumber themselves with occupations and associations at variance with the objects of the calling which every man has accepted who has put on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Such a choice can only be due to a want of recognition of the practical nature of the demands which the Gospel makes. Those demands have to do entirely with the present life ; and if men exclude them, there can only arise one result, the decay of the spiritual man now, and denial by Christ at his coming. Spiritual vigour now, and recognition by Christ at his coming, can only be secured in the way the Spirit itself has provided, and that is, first, by a diligent submission to its tuition in the word, which practically means the daily and methodical reading of the Scriptures, and secondly, by an avoidance of the pleasures of the world and the society of fools. Compliance with the Spirit's requirements in these particulars may entail a sense of deprivation sometimes, but in the long run it brings great satisfaction and peace, and lays up in store a harvest at the appointed time of joy and well-being, which it is alike beyond the power of speech to exaggerate, or human imagination to conceive.

The Word Enduring For Ever

The word enduring for ever.—The consolation.—Stability of the universe.—Theories to the contrary.—Revealed truth.—God the Rock.—No place for accidental perdition.—Heaven and earth for ever.—The purpose of Jehovah standeth sure.—Another aspect of the subject.—Individual dependence on the word.—Morally now, physically afterwards.—The burden of a sin-cursed nature.—Prophecy sure.—Damascus gone.—Other prophecies.—Impotence of brilliant adversaries.—Their voice hushed.—The hope of the righteous.—The difference between the believer and the unbeliever.—Reason for Israel's desolation, forgetting God.—Individual application of the lesson.—The offences of all society.—The interdict of friendship with the world.—Exhortation beautiful and necessary.—Sunday morning.—A voice always to be heard in life.—The visible divine ritual of the past.—An interregnum.—Worship survives, but not as a system.—Approaching God, and the comfort of it.—Worship in spirit and in truth.—The latter-day rushing of the nations.

WE have often read in the scriptures the assurance that "the word of the Lord endureth for ever." There is a great deal of consolation in that assurance when we realize all that it involves. There are two phases in which we can consider it. There is, first, the one exhibited in the fact stated by David and repeated in the first chapter of John, that by "the word of the Lord were the heavens made"; and by Paul, that He "upholdeth all things by the word of his power." In this aspect of it, we realize the stability of the universe. Some may think there is no particular need for realizing this. They will think otherwise if they call to mind the many theories, held some of them by the most scientific of men, to the effect that the universe is in a state of constant transmutation, and that there is no guarantee that the earth may not be blown to perdition by internal explosives or slowly disappear by disintegration, or that the sun itself may not go out from exhaustion. We are helpless in reference to such depressing and demoralizing thoughts if we rely merely upon our thoughts as natural men. We can show no reason in the nature of things why heaven and earth should endure. The fact that they have continued till now only establishes a reasonable presumption that they will still continue: it does not prove that they will. For all that we know about it, it may be as the speculators dismally forebode; it might be that the materials of the universe might lose their cohesion and shape, and relapse to chaos, involving us all in a general annihilation. But when we realize the truth of the Scriptures, and, therefore, the truth of the statement that "the word of the Lord endureth for ever," we have strong consolation. It is a great revelation that all things exist in the will of God; that all things are but the concretion of His invisible energy according to His intention. There is no room for accidental perdition or spontaneous dissolution here. Nothing can interfere with the foundation things have in the word of Jehovah. It is no inflated figure of speech that describes God as the Rock. Its perfect appropriateness is evident when we think of His Spirit as the medium and formative executor of His purposes, radiated by His volition from the presence of His eternal

power and glory. This is His word in its physical relations. There is rest for our feeble minds in the fact that His word is everlasting : that though the world passeth away, and human life as we know it at present is a fading flower, " the purpose of the Lord standeth sure." We have His word for it that heaven and earth are for ever : therefore, we are unaffected by the theories and thoughts that would make all things uncertain, and our lives as the mere bubbles on a restless ocean of everlasting change. We rest in the Lord, and have the comfort of hope and the quietness of assurance for ever. We are tranquillized and made glad by the knowledge that the Eternal Father has a purpose involving the perpetual stability of the glorious place we inhabit, that in ages to come He will show us His kindness in Christ Jesus, when His Name shall have attained that exaltation among men which is the basis of all blessedness.

But there is another aspect of the subject. The word of the Lord stands related to us in what He has said by the holy men of God, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit ; and this has a practical bearing upon our well-being as individuals. In a certain sense, this is the more important of the two aspects of the subject. The stability of heaven and earth is of no special value to those who stand unfavourably related to the word of the Lord in its individual application. It is no comfort to a man lying in prison under sentence of death, that heaven and earth are safe from cataclysm. On the contrary, he would be glad if all things went to ruin with him. It is to the durability of the word of the Lord in this sense that we now devote a few thoughts. Peter applies it directly in the following quotation from Isaiah : "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away : but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. *And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.*"

How entirely the truth of this is realized in the experience both of ourselves and others. Human power fails : we feel how feeble we are in many ways, but more particularly in the direction of things that are good. How destitute the natural man is of spiritual resources ! The outward man perisheth, and how entirely the renewing of the inward man from day to day is dependent upon the daily feeding on this word, as the newborn babe upon milk. There is a certain consolation in these facts. The weakness of flesh and blood is a beneficial experience, in so far as it gives a right direction to our thoughts. We are brought to the point of abandoning confidence in ourselves, and leaning more and more on the strength derivable from the Rock of our salvation. We recognize the inevitable, and give up the weary effort of trying to stand in the mire. We recognize that in ourselves there is no good thing, and that we must be content to hold on to the hope of the Gospel, and to rest in the Lord and wait patiently for the day of blessing. While the curse prevails we cannot be free. We are free in our legal relations to God, but we still await the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. We carry the burden of a sin-cursed nature till we are released in the change to the incorruptible. When this is attained we shall know experimentally what is meant by the words, " There shall be no more curse." Till then we must be content with our share of that "groaning within ourselves, being burdened," which is part of our appointed probation. Even Paul felt the weight of it. Those feel it heaviest,

SEASONS OF COMFORT

in a spiritual sense, who have the keenest appreciation of the things of the Spirit, and it is these who rejoice the most at the prospect of the deliverance which will be theirs at the appointed time. The hope of this deliverance stands on the same foundation as the stability of heaven and earth : "The word of the Lord endureth for ever." On this foundation we can rest in peace, even amidst all the tribulation which is our inevitable portion in the present evil world.

In the chapter read this morning from Isaiah, we have another illustration of the fact that the word of the Lord endureth for ever. It is a prophecy concerning Damascus, which at the time the prophecy was written, about twenty-seven hundred years ago, was a flourishing state on the border of the kingdom of Israel. The prophecy is, that Damascus would be taken away from being a city and become a ruinous heap ; that the fortress would also cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus. At the time the prophecy was written, there was nothing to indicate that it would come to pass. Could we go back to that time, we should find every appearance of stability in Damascus and Ephraim—cities with high walls, rearing their towers to heaven, streets thronging with healthy, busy people, engrossed with the interests of the day as men now are, and pompous official men, swelling with the importance always associated with sense of power and possession. In these surroundings the words of the prophet would seem not only improbable, but insane. Yet those words, written in quietness at a long distance from Damascus, have prevailed, and are with us today, when the pomp and glory they denounced are a dream of the past. They were the word of the Lord which endureth for ever. The lesson is of great practical value to us, because of other prophecies that are as yet only matters of hope. Men around us condemn these prophecies ; but where are their little heats when even a generation is past ? Ask this of a hundred years ago. There were men of busy thought and brilliant diatribe among the adversaries of the Bible, and their words were powerful with many, both in exciting public meetings and in the eagerly scanned page of written declamation. Their thought was, they had quenched the Scriptures, and established the light of a dawning "age of reason." But time has rolled on, and they have passed into the grave, and their stout words are forgotten, while the word of the Lord, enduring for ever, has quietly and irresistibly, like the laws of the universe, accomplished itself in the history of mankind, tending by degrees toward the appointed consummation when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever.

It might be rejoined by the caviller that the believer has fared no better than the unbeliever ; that he also has been silenced in the relentless progress of decay. There would be force in this retort, if the purpose of God contemplated nothing further with those who are in obedient sympathy with it ; but the contrary being the case, it is devoid of all reason. "The righteous hath hope in his death," so it is written in the word of the Lord which endureth for ever. This hope is, that he shall awake from his sleep in the dust at the appointed crisis in the divine scheme, to participate in the reality and the interest and the joy and the glory of a renewed and higher life in this earthly scene of probation. So also it is written, as we know. It is in this relation of things that the difference between the believer and

the unbeliever is manifest. The believer sleeps as well as the unbeliever ; but he sleeps the briefest sleep he ever slept, to awake to the sweetness of the noblest aspirations realized—a sweetness all the sweeter for the weariness of the deferred hope of a life of faith now. The unbeliever goes to the grave with rebellion in his heart, and deprives himself of the blessing which the future holds. Even worse than this, he may find he has treasured for himself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God (Rom. 2 : 5). When this coming time is reached, the difference between the two classes will be palpable. The difference is not apparent now. The fool seems to walk in his folly with impunity, and the righteous man seems to deny himself without result ; but the day in question will manifest them both to the discernment of all, as it is written : “ Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.”

Returning to Isaiah (chapter 17), it is observable that the era of the desolation of Damascus was also to be one of leanness to Jacob (verse 4). “ In that day it shall come to pass that the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean.” The following verses (from 5 to 11) are occupied with a description of the adversity thus alluded to. This description is briefly summarized in the statement in verse 9, “ There shall be desolation.” A notable feature in the description is the reason given for the desolation that should befall the house of Israel. This reason deserves particular notice, as it affords us a lesson of true wisdom capable of individual application. The reason is, “ Because thou hast forgotten the God of thy salvation, and hast not been mindful of the Rock of thy strength.” We are informed by Paul that these things were written for our instruction. The generation to whom they were actually addressed has long since passed into oblivion, but we live with the words in our hands : and is it not a lesson of instruction we need ? What shall we be rejected for if we are rejected, but for this very offence of Israel ? It is the glaring offence of all society around us. People are not mindful of the Rock of their strength. God is not in all their thoughts. They are taken up with what they have and what they are, to the exclusion of the Bestower of all. They take all the credit as if they were the creators of the things they boast in. The wise man claims and receives the credit of his wisdom ; the strong man glories in his strength as though it were his own production ; the rich man puts on high looks and arrogant airs, as though the permission to control a little more substance than his neighbour were a reasonable ground of lordship. In this lies the thorough ungodliness of the world, and the great barrier to friendship with it on the part of those who have been separated by the word to be the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty. The world robs God of the recognition and reverence and praise which are His. If they profess that they know God, in works they deny Him. What fellowship hath light with darkness ? Only those who have a name to live and are dead could be found advocating a friendship which Jesus has forbidden and himself has set us the example of refusing. Shall we unite in bonds of friendship with those for whom Christ would not pray ? “ I pray not for the world ” (John 17 : 9). Surely, no one could be guilty of it who believes in Christ and reverences him as our leader and teacher sent from God. We must be on our guard ; the beginnings of things are in-

SEASONS OF COMFORT

sidious. Little slips lead to greater ones. Resist the devil and he will flee : give in to him a little, and he will soon push the door open and force himself into the house. Let us daily meet with God in the word, and we shall be strengthened to see and walk in the right way. If we neglect the reading of the word, under the idea that it is a formal and superfluous affair, we shall lose ground, and come to experience what Paul meant when he spoke of being "hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Against this he asks the brethren to be on their guard ; and to help one another to be on guard. His words are, "*Exhort one another daily*, while it is called Today, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3 : 13). Incessant exhortation of a reasonable sort is both healthful and necessary. It is apostolically enjoined and experimentally demonstrated to be necessary. This must be the explanation of these Sunday morning addresses. To some the voice may appear harsh and the standard high ; but they will change their minds when the shadow of death comes over them, or the glory of the judgment-seat overwhelms them. They will see that this constant affirmation of the truth of God in its bearing on the house of God is the highest kindness, and perhaps may have conferred even on them at last, the highest benefit which it is possible for one man to receive at the hand of another. At all events, whether acceptable or otherwise, as long as God permits this voice to be heard in the land of the living it will be heard on behalf of the great and universally neglected fact that if men are unmindful of the Creator of heaven and earth, they forfeit the title to existence at His hand, and will at last experience that ruin that came upon His own nation Israel because of this offence.

There is a remarkable statement in the course of the prophecy we are considering. It is to the effect that when Israel's greatness shall have shrunk to the condition of a plucked vine, with only here and there a gleaned grape on the outmost branches, "at that day shall a man look to his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel." It seems to me there is a considerable parallel between this statement and the statement made by Jesus to the woman at the well of Samaria. They both refer at all events to the same period of Israel's experience (when there shall be desolation), and they seem to affirm the same thing. What I refer to will be found in John 4. You will recollect that the woman said, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain ; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." And Jesus answered, "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain nor yet at Jerusalem worship the Father. . . . But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth : for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit : and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Now there is great point in both statements, when we recollect that up to that time there was a visible ritual of divine appointment by which God was worshipped in the place He chose to place His name there. It was a great luxury to take part in such a divinely-appointed service. But the time was at hand when this service was to be suppressed, and the divine system of Moses scattered to the wind. The question would naturally suggest itself, Would worship therefore cease ? The statements of Isaiah and of Jesus both show that though there would be an interregnum in the national organization of

worship, worship itself, during the period of Israel's downtreading, would continue, but in a simpler, even an individual form. It is here that we are interested. We have no temple to which we can repair. We have no priest to whom we can take the visible tokens of our submission and confession. We have no established and striking service of worship in which we can take part. We are inorganic units, sojourning among the Gentiles while chaos reigns in the land of promise. We can only worship as individuals. But there is consolation in the thought that our individual worship is acceptable, if offered in spirit and in truth. Nay, the Father *seeketh such* to worship Him. What a comfort here, that the Possessor of heaven and earth finds pleasure in the approaches of those who believe in Him, and who approach Him in truth and not in pretence: in spirit and not in form merely. To make this approach, we need not to go to a particular place. We require not to come together, though coming together is required of us under another head. God fills heaven and earth. He is not far from every one of us. He knoweth our thoughts afar off. We need but to turn our thoughts and words to Him. This seeks and needs solitude. The human mind is weak. We cannot attend to God and man at the same time. While in a sense we may set God always before our face, we must step aside from even the dearest friends when we mean to address ourselves to the Father in the particular manner implied in the word prayer. It is frequently recorded of Jesus that he withdrew from the multitude and spent even whole nights in prayer. And in this matter, the true heart instinctively shuns the situation of the hypocrite, who desires it to be known he is praying. Prayer in spirit and in truth seeks absolute privacy as Jesus enjoins. Of course, the public exercises of the brethren in the assemblies of the saints stand in a different category; but even in these, when the leader of our approaches is a true man and no mere performer, the words of the petition will be brief and modest and subdued—a result certain to accompany a consciousness of God. But the primary reference of the words under consideration is doubtless to those individual acts of worship which are a constant luxury and strength to such as worship God in spirit and in truth.

The chapter conducts the desolation of Israel to a certain tumult of nations described in verses 12-14. "The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind. Behold at eveningtide trouble; and before the morning he is not. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us." A knowledge of the truth has enabled us to comprehend this. The long period of Israel's dispersion is to be terminated by a period of national convulsions among the Gentiles, marked by the advent, during their progress, of Israel's crucified deliverer, who breaks their power, and proceeds to the rebuilding of the fallen tabernacle of David. We are privileged to have seen the rushing of nations begin. We are in the eveningtide of Gentile prosperity. There is trouble brewing, even the time of trouble such as never was. Before the morning of the glorious day of salvation, the power of Israel's robbers will have ceased to exist. But the transition is a time of blood and turmoil—a time of upheaving the old foundations—a time of judgment which will teach the world righteousness. Knowing this before by the word of truth, we are able to

endure with calmness a prospect which is filling the minds of other men with fear : and to use the time that yet remaineth in preparing for the long-promised redemption that draweth nigh.

The World

Society in the days of David and Jesus.—Libellers of their contemporaries according to natural men.—The human rule of estimating character.—A higher rule.—A mighty difference.—Robbing God.—The educated and the uneducated alike.—Wickedness ripe.—British and American society.—All live for themselves.—All things for God.—Recognition of this the peculiarity of the children of God.—Pious professions.—The garniture of refined selfishness.—The coming vengeance.—Appearances at present opposed to reality.—A people in preparation from the poor.—The reason of the selection.—God's glory first.—A speech rarely made.—The rich and the wise not chosen.—The poor rejected also if not rich in faith.—God's chosen the choicest of mankind.—A point obscured by the apostasy.—Faith without works unprofitable.—Denying Christ in more ways than one.—Christ wants friends.

In our day, we stand related to the same system of things in society that prevailed in another form in the days of David and Jesus. That system, as existing in their day, is reflected in the portions of Scripture read this morning. David says, "Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? Do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men? Yea, in heart ye work wickedness." Here was a "congregation" and a generation professedly speaking righteousness and judging uprightly, and yet in reality practising the principles of wickedness, when their conduct was estimated according to the divine standard. Jesus, in the same way, said of the ruling class of his day, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees"; "Do not according to their works . . . all their works they do for to be seen of men." The Pharisees were the leaders of the people, in whose eyes they "outwardly appeared righteous." They were highly esteemed for a reputation of superior sanctity, which they laboured to preserve by long prayers and neglected toilet. Jesus said, "That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." The common run of men have a difficulty in understanding this. It is because they have not learnt to see things as God sees them. Men can only acquire divine modes of thought by constant familiarity with the divine mind, as expressed in the Scriptures. This is the last thing men seek to cultivate. Consequently their views and their judgments of things are according to the natural mind and not according to God. Such men, living in the days of David or of Jesus, would have differed from them altogether in their estimate of society. They would have considered David and Jesus libellers of their contemporaries. They would have said of the people condemned, that they were respectable, and worthy, and highly moral people; for were they not active, brisk, prompt, business-like and polite, attending honestly to their own business; frugal and industrious in their ways, and conforming with all the religious practices of the age?

They would, in fact, have imputed superior virtue where Jesus and David declared iniquity to prevail. Whence the difference of judgment? In the difference of the rule of measurement. "Men will praise thee when thou *doest well to thyself*" (Psa. 49 : 18). This is the human rule. When a man succeeds in business or inherits property, and lays out a vast expenditure in his surroundings—acquiring an estate, and lavishing luxuries on his wife and children, he is considered an estimable person. Doing well to his wife and family, he is "doing well to himself," and men praise him. But men of the principles of David and Jesus look upon the scene from a different standpoint, and come to a different conclusion as to what they see. They recognize a higher morality than enters into the heart of the natural man to conceive. There is a higher rule of action before their minds. The natural man sees only man : the spiritual man sees God. This is the difference between them ; and it is a mighty difference. It explains all the divergences and antagonisms that have raged between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, in the history of the past and the experience of the present. The natural man, knowing nothing beyond human objects and human rules of action, sees his neighbour laying up treasure for himself, with all harmlessness ; and recognizing no obligation to be "rich towards God" (Luke 12 : 21), he sees nothing wrong, and is amazed at the condemnations of Jesus. The man of the Spirit, looking on the same neighbour, says, "Well, he is all right as regards men ; but how is he towards God?" A man can rob God ; and this is a far worse breach of morality than robbing man. Such a breach is thought nothing of in the world ; in fact, it is a point of morality altogether outside their "ethics." Men can be steeped to the neck in this kind of wickedness, without incurring the smallest degree of odium. In fact the odium is incurred when the principle is recognized and carried out. "The FIRST and the GREAT commandment" has reference to our duties towards God. Consequently, the disobedience of it is the first and the most heinous crime that can be committed. It is here that the world, in its most cultured and respectable form, is guilty of wickedness so great and prevailing, as to justify the description of John : "The world lieth in wickedness." They live for themselves only and absolutely : the honour of God and the pleasure of God in the doing of those things He has commanded (and they are many) is absent from all their schemes and all their maxims. If this is true of the educated, what is the state of "the great unwashed"? The best description of the whole situation is that which says that "the harvest of the earth is ripe : their wickedness is great." This description applies to the time in which we live ; for it is alleged concerning the epoch now hard upon us, when God in Christ comes forth to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity (Isa. 26 : 21), taking vengeance on them that "know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The natural man, looking out upon British and American society, cannot see how the description applies. He thinks the world respectable and moral. Let him learn what true righteousness is, and his difficulty will be at an end. The first principle of acceptable righteousness is the giving to God of that which we owe to Him. The first principle of natural-man morality is the giving of that which we owe to ourselves. Herein is the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

difference. Judge the world by this principle, and you will come to a very different conclusion as to its state from that to which the natural man *alias* the carnal mind comes to. The world proceeds on the assumption that it exists for its own gratification and behoof ; it ignores the fact that all things were made for the divine pleasure first. The world experiences no inconvenience from this, and therefore it perseveres. The sun shines, and the seasons come and go with their laden goodness ; all things go steadily forward in an even course of prosperity for such as labour to do well for themselves ; therefore their hearts are hardened in evil. " Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil." But, as saith the same solemn voice, " Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God . . . for God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil " (Eccl. 8 : 11 ; 12 : 14). The difference between the children of God and the children of the devil is, that the children of God recognize that they are not their own, but the property of God, through Christ ; and therefore live not for themselves, but for the honour of God and for the comfort of all His suffering friends around ; while the children of the devil regard themselves as their own, and live for no higher end than the comfort of their own souls in all the honours and luxuries which their efforts can command ; for the acquisition of which no labour is considered too great, no expense too lavish, and no occupation of time too excessive. Yet, having a keen relish for the praise of men, these respectable children of the devil in most cases try to keep up a character for " piety." They dearly love to be thought godly. Hence the state of things described and condemned in the portions of Scripture read. They professed regard for righteousness, and outwardly appeared righteous unto men.

This is precisely the state of things in our day. Religion is professedly the foundation upon which society is built ; and most people strive after a character for religiousness. Yet, as in the days of David and Jesus, nothing is more rare than the righteousness with which God is pleased. Under the mask of piety, the world is wicked. Professedly religious, the world at heart is the very devil. The whole machinery of religion works like the rattling bones of a skeleton ; and respectability is nothing more than the refined snobbery of a highly-garnished selfishness. " Everyone for himself," is their confessed motto ; " God for us all " is the universal lie : for God has spoken and declared that He hates all workers of iniquity, and that His wrathful and utter extirpation of the whole generation of them, as at the flood and Sodom, is only a question of due time.

David refers to and prays for this time in the Psalm read : " Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth : break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Yahweh." This is a strong figure, but not so strong as the next : " The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance : *he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.* So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous : verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth." This is as much as to say that at present, it would seem as if there was no reward for the righteous, and as if there was no God of judgment. This is precisely as it appears. The course of righteousness appears a course of

fruitless sacrifice and unrequited labour ; the righteous man appears a fool for his pains ; and it would seem as if there were no intelligent God at work, with eyes beholding in every place, seeing the evil and the good, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart, and arranging to cause every man at last to find according to his ways. But this is all a mere appearance. When the time arrives for God to speak and to show bared the arm of His strength, these facts which at present are matters of faith, and which appear to be the flights of imagination, will shine out in blinding strength before the eyes of all nations. Then will be fulfilled the words by Malachi : " Then shall ye return and discern *between the righteous and the wicked : between HIM THAT SERVETH GOD, and him that serveth him not.*" Happy then will be the man who perseveres in faith, " against hope," like Abraham, " believing in hope," denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world ; looking for the blessed hope and the glorious appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works (Titus 2 : 12-15).

The work of purifying such a people is principally conducted among the poor and the illiterate. It was a feature of the work in the days of Jesus, that " the poor had the gospel preached unto them " (Luke 7 : 22). It is the declaration of an apostle that " God hath chosen the poor of this world " (Jas. 2 : 5). The corollary of this is not left to mere inference, but is boldly expressed by Jesus himself : " How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven ! " (Mark 10 : 23). In this arrangement, Jesus rejoiced. We find him saying in the other portion read : " *I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and the prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father : for so it seemed good in thy sight.*" Why has it seemed good in the sight of God to pass by the rich and the wise and the prudent, and to make choice of the poor and the " babes " in natural wisdom ? There is a reason, and it is not difficult to find. Jesus gives us the clue in saying, " Except a man humble himself as a little child, he shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of God." We get another clue in these other words of the Spirit, " *The fear of the Lord is the BEGINNING OF wisdom.*" " They that *feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name,*" is a prophetic description of those accepted before Him in the day when He " makes up His jewels " ; and this is expressly defined many times to be the basis of acceptable character before Him, namely, brokenness of spirit resulting from trembling reverence of His Word. The same idea is expressed in other words where we read, " Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might ; let not the rich man glory in his riches : but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me " (Jer. 9 : 23).

All these things put together enable us to see why God has not made choice of the rich and the educated, " the wise and the prudent " : they think too much of themselves to be of any use to Him. His own glory is the first object in all His work ; in this respect He is " a jealous God " (Joshua 24 : 19). The rich and the wise of this world take all the glory to themselves. Their own honour, their own interests, are the all-absorbing

SEASONS OF COMFORT

law of their lives. This is a universal rule with few exceptions. You can scarcely find a rich man saying, "I am rich, but God has made me so, and in thanksgiving to Him, I hold my privileges as a stewardship, of which He will require an account at my hands. I am cultivated in mind and well-favoured in flesh; but this gives me no ground of boasting. I have come to be so through circumstances that were not in my control. I thank God for it; I honour Him; I hold all from Him. I will show my submission to Him in having compassion on those less favoured, showing mercy to the poor and having a care of my neighbour as he has commanded." Rather do the rich build their nests on the loftiest heights of pride and cast God from their thoughts, and show no mercy to those of lower estate, whose fortune is just as little their own blame as the higher estate of the other is their credit. If the rich as such are unfit for God's purpose, how much more so are the "wise," who in the smattering acquaintance they have made with the works of God, swell with a conceit against Him which is marvellous to behold? Among the poor and the babes, God finds those who are glad to receive His goodness and praise His wisdom, and to abase themselves as the highest reason enjoins before the irresponsible prerogative of the Possessor of heaven and earth.

But let us not fall into a mistake on the other side. God hath chosen the poor in the world, but not because they are poor only. Millions of poor will rot for ever in the dust because they are nothing but poor—poor in purse, poor in mind, poor in intellect, poor in faith—poor in everything. If men have nothing but poverty as a ground of acceptance before God they will be as certainly unchosen as the purse-proud, unscrupulous, God-forgetting aristocrats. There is a certain thing in which the poor to whom the Gospel is preached must be "rich" before they will be chosen as the heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love Him. James defines this thing when he calls them "the poor of this world—*rich in faith*"—rich, *rich*, RICH! God's chosen are those who are "rich in faith." Abraham is said to be their father, because the prominent example of faith in ancient times and the holder of the promises. He was "*strong in faith*," "GIVING GLORY TO GOD" (Rom. 4 : 20). Abraham's children will be all like him. The chosen of God, though mainly gathered from the poor, will be far from the mean, lean, spiritless, insipid, ignorant, vapid, and uninteresting class that some men imagine to be meant by the scriptural description. Though lowly in mind towards God, and poor, as a rule, in their present condition, they will be the choicest of mankind in their intelligence, wisdom, and excellence. "Filled with all wisdom," "full of good fruits," is the New Testament description of their attainments. The religion of the apostasy has obscured this point much. It has made it appear that the great point is to have a soul saved from hell, however "wretched and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." In fact, the viler the wretch, the more eligible for salvation, is the practical motto of the system. It is a relief to turn from such a disgusting practice to contemplate the beauty of apostolic teaching. The unprofitable will be rejected. The fruitful to and in the Spirit will alone be accepted. "*Rich in faith*" they will—*must*—all be. This implies a strong conviction of the truthfulness of the truth and a pointed appreciation of all it relates to, and an unflinching choice of all it calls men to, even to the "taking up of the cross"

to follow Christ in his present humiliation in the earth. Richness of faith must go beyond mere persuasion ; there must be—not only belief that God will perform what He has promised, in raising the dead, and bringing the kingdom of the world into subjection to His Son, but there must be a doing of those things that have been commanded for those who do believe. “ Faith without works is dead, being alone.” A man who says he believes, but lives in disobedience—either as regards things forbidden or things commanded—is of the class whom Paul condemns as those “ who profess that they know God, but in works *deny him*.” Christ can be denied in more ways than one. You deny him, of course, if you say he was an impostor ; you deny him also if, believing in him, you are ashamed to confess him for fear of ridicule ; but you deny him in the worst way of all if, believing in him and professing your belief, you live as if you believed in him not at all. Such is the man who says he believes the world is passing away, and Christ is coming, to whom we shall have to give an account, and that the kingdom of God will be our possession if he approves of us ; but who bestows his whole energy in thoughts of labour to the building-up of his own temporal well-being in the present evil world. Such a man had need listen to the exhortation of James : “ Be ye **DOERS** of the word, and not hearers only, *deceiving your own selves*.” Many will find at last that they have been deceiving themselves in their hope of acceptance. Christ wants **FRIENDS**—men with hearts at his disposal—men given over to him—men with whom he is the governing idea, the star of their course, the mainspring of their movements, the inspiration of their life. He will have no use for the opinionists, theorists, and doctrinaires. Hair-splitting definitionists and worldly schemers will be equally unfit for the great work and the great society to be inaugurated at his second appearing. That work and that time will be for men only in whom he dwells by faith, and whose hearts, constrained by his enlightened love, impel them to a whole-souled attachment to his service at a time when all seek their own and not the things that are Jesus Christ’s.

Enmity of Classes

David and his enemies—A picture not comprehended by literary readers.—Its explanation.—The Divine plan of probation involving enmity between God's friends and enemies.—The character of mankind.—The inciting cause.—This character evil.—The truth detested, and why.—The world's enmity the certain lot of faithful men.—Hatred within as well as without.—The reason.—Trouble inevitable, but woe to the troubler.—“ Offence ” something more than hurting people's feelings.—Effects on others.—The strong to consider the weak.—Unprofitable servants and the reverse.—An apparent contradiction.—Of God's goodness that service will be rewarded.—The truly unprofitable to be rejected.—The closing retribution.

IN the Psalm read this morning, we have David again among his enemies and praying to be delivered from their wiles. It is remarkable how constantly this feature presents itself, not only in the Psalms, but in the personal writings of the other prophets. It is true the ultimate application is to Christ (both in head and body), the “ testimony ” for whom, both as to his sufferings and the glory that shall be revealed, is the very “ spirit of prophecy ” (Rev. 19 : 10), but in the first instance, the constant picture of conflict with malicious enemies was realized in the experience of the prophets themselves. This picture is not comprehended by merely literary readers of the writings of the Spirit. It is in fact made a ground of their rejection by some. They argue that the product of inspiration would not have been marred (as they regard it) by this constant exhibition of strife on the part of the writers. Their ideal of such matters would lead them to expect tranquil discourse of the sublime order of Gentile poets and philosophers. They are not aware that the very peculiarity which they interpret as against the writings in question, is one of the strongest evidences of their genuineness in all senses. Two things require it : first, the plan of God as disclosed in the Scriptures, and secondly, the character of mankind as we actually find it. The plan as revealed is to “ take out from among ” the bulk, a certain “ few ” who are chosen, on the principle of faith and obedience under difficulty. These are to be “ delivered from the present evil world,” as Paul expresses it, after they have faithfully endured for an appointed time the tribulation incident to being in it, while not of it. This being the plan (and no man believing the Scriptures can say this is not the plan revealed therein), a state of incompatibility and consequent enmity between the “ few ” and the many is the inevitable result. The character of mankind in their bulk, is of course the inciting cause of this enmity. This character is defined in the Scriptures by the phrase “ desperately wicked.” Genteel people do not agree with this definition, but it is true nevertheless, as any one may perceive who judges the character of the world by the scriptural rule of action. Wickedness, according to this rule, is the forgetting of God, the omission to constantly do the highest honour to Him, the ignoring of His will in expression of our thoughts and the formation of our purposes ; and the doing contrary to His commandments in the many matters that go to constitute “ life.” Judge the world

by this rule and you see at once that John's testimony is true that "the world lieth in wickedness." God is absolutely ignored and His law cast aside with contempt. The sole rule of action is self-interest in one form or the other. In some cases it takes a very refined form : but in its essence it is the same—the rejection of God, the service of natural inclination. The love of money—the love of honour, the love of ease, or the love of appetite will be found to comprehend the motives that rule the world : for the obedience of the powers that be springs from these. There would be no respect for authority if it were not for the power in the hands of authority to interfere with the things that are dear to the world's heart. But for restraints imposed by this power, society would soon be a chaos.

Where the world is at liberty to do as it likes, such as the society it shall choose, the causes it shall support, the way it shall spend its spare money and spare time, you see the cloven hoof at once. It honours those who flatter it ; it gives itself to those things that pander to its inclinations or fill its pocket, and all this with the utmost "respectability." Those things that are pleasing to its carnal mind are in high esteem with it. The things of the Spirit are not only unintelligible to it, they are distasteful to it when even faintly understood ; yea, they are most odious to it, and all who preach them are an abomination. It hates those who preach the truth, because the truth is something it detests, and by "the truth" is meant something higher than that phrase means in the mouths of some people. It means not merely that man is mortal, that Christ will come, that the Jews will be restored, the dead will be raised ; these are but branches of the tree. The vitality of the tree lies in the root, and the root in this case is the relation of God to man. Tell the world the truth on this point, and the world will hate you. It does not like to be told that God is its possessor ; that His honour should be its highest virtue ; His obedience its highest pleasure ; that it is not at liberty to do as it likes ; that Christ is the heir of all things ; that he will bring vengeance and destruction because of its wickedness. It burns with anger against those who say that it is not righteous ; that it is astray from the right way ; that even its goodness is besmeared with the mire of carnal motive. It is so sensitive on this point that even if this testimony is confined to example, it resents it, and brands with evil-speaking the objects of its hatred.

In view of these things, it is not difficult to understand that peculiarity of the Psalms of David which shows us the writer in continual conflict with surrounding enemies, and exercised greatly toward them, as in the Psalm this morning, wherein he says, "Hear my voice, O God, in my prayer : preserve my life from fear of the enemy. Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked ; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity ; who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words : that they may shoot in secret at the perfect" (Psa. 64 : 1-4). This experience is no accident, nor was it exceptional in David's case. It was the experience of the Lord himself, as of course, the words of David (referring ultimately to Christ) required. It is the experience of all who follow in their steps. Jesus declared this would be the case. "In the world ye shall have tribulation. Marvel not if the world hate you. Ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, therefore the world

SEASONS OF COMFORT

hateth you." Plainly also did he say, "Ye cannot serve two masters," and this principle he has applied to all who obey him, in declaring through James, and John, that "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." "All that is in the world is not of the Father. Love not the world."

There are two ways of looking at this. The first is, that the truth calls us to submit to something that is very disagreeable to bear. As nothing is sweeter to the majority of men than honour, so nothing is more bitter than to be treated as the offscouring of all things. There are a thousand little ways in which honour can be given or withheld, and it may be that the little ways are more telling than the big ones. The bow of hearty recognition is sweeter than a testimonial : the turning away of the countenance may be more galling than public execration. To the loss of the former and the inheritance of the latter, a faithful course in the truth will bring any man. What shall we say to it ? Why, that if we are genuine brethren of the apostolic band of the first century, we shall rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. This leads to the other reflection. There is a natural desire in every earnest mind to have the opportunity of suffering thus for Christ's sake. Some such may bewail their lack. Such discontentment ought to be banished at once. It is next door to running unto persecution, which is sinful. We ought to wait God's testing opportunities. They will come in due time if we are worthy of them, and if they are not His, they are worthless. No reasonable mind will seek discomfort or persecution. The belief, profession, and practice of the principles of the truth ought to be our aim. If these are steadfastly and consistently maintained, the dishonour and the enmity which these always provoke in the present evil world, will not be long in manifesting themselves.

And the words of Christ in the portion read from Luke, remind us that these will be found "within" as well as "without." He says, "It must needs be that offences come." The context shows he is speaking of the brethren. All who are called are not the chosen. Many are called but few are chosen. The reason of this is that the choice is limited to those who are led by the Spirit of God. "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the children of God." A man who is guided by the ideas communicated by the Spirit through the apostles is guided by the Spirit ; for these ideas, in their communicated form, are the power of the Spirit in the world for the effectuation of its work. Now, not all who profess the truth walk in it ; some walk after the desires and inclinations of the natural man. There always are in the truth those who are of the flesh and those who are of the Spirit. For this reason, offences will come, and "it must needs be." It is part of the appointed discipline by which the affections of the spiritual are shaken loose from all human ties and associations, and made to rest on the eternal foundation. It is, therefore, a mistake to look for a perfect community, or to expect that at any time we may reckon on freedom from trouble henceforward. There will be trouble as long as the present state of things lasts. Man is born to it. The fact helps us to take it without dismay or discouragement. Forgetfulness of the fact has worked disastrously in some cases, when the trouble came.

But there is the other side : "*Woe unto that man by whom they come* : it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones." Here

is a great caution to our ways. Let none of us suffer as an evil-doer (1 Pet. 4 : 15). Let none of us be in trouble through misdeeds : let none of us be on the wrong side of the "offences" when they come. It is well to realize what "offences" mean here. Does it mean hurting people's feelings ? If so, how shall we obey the command to reprove the "unfruitful works of darkness" ? (Eph. 5 : 11). Christ hurt the feelings of the Pharisees : for it is written that on one occasion, the Pharisees were "offended" when they heard what Jesus said (Matt. 15 : 12). It is impossible in testifying against the wrong to avoid hurting the feelings of those who are in the wrong. This is not what Jesus meant by "offence." The word "offence" had a stronger meaning in English in the days of James I than it has now. It fails now to convey the full meaning of the original word, which is to hurt substantially ; to cause to stumble ; to bring into mischief. The idea is expressed by Paul where he says, "Through thy knowledge shall the weak brother PERISH, for whom Christ died ?" (1 Cor. 8 : 11). Woe to the man who turns believers out of the way. Here is a lesson of a sobering character which wise men will apply in many ways. It is a check against reckless independence of action. We have to consider consequences as affecting others. We may feel ourselves at liberty to do many things as between ourselves and God, which we shall be deterred from doing if we consider their probable effects upon those who may not discern so clearly. It is in this respect that Paul says, "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves." He advised the strong-minded brother of the first century not to eat meat in the idol's temple, though to good sense the idol was nothing, and the meat good, and the temple a beautiful shelter from the weather ; because a weak-minded brother might construe his act into a participation with the idolatry, and might be emboldened to do things which would defile his conscience. In our day, the duty of consideration for others has shifted from idolatry to the ways of the world. There are many things we might do if we had only ourselves to consider. But when we reflect that our liberty may help to drive back into bondage those who are struggling to be free, it will help us to deny ourselves. If we abandon circumspection in such matters, we shall find at last we have made a mistake. "Am I my brother's keeper ?" is the question of Cain, and all who go through life with this sentiment in their mouths will find themselves in Cain's company on the day of straightening. Christ's commandment is, "Love one another," and the only thing that will yield satisfaction in that great day, will be the knowledge of having obeyed the commandments of Christ.

This brings us to a saying of Christ's which is written in the chapter read from Luke : "When ye shall have done all these things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants : we have done that which was our duty to do." Several things suggest themselves as we reflect on this. The first is an apparent contradiction between this and that part of Christ's teachings wherein he says the unprofitable servant will be cast out and the profitable servant only accepted. The apparent contradiction arises from the use of the same word in two connections. There is no real contradiction. The unprofitable servant to be cast out was one who yielded no fruit, who lived in disobedience of his Lord's commands ; the "unprofitable servants" of the saying under consideration are those who have

SEASONS OF COMFORT

“done all those things which were commanded of them.” The question is, in what sense are those unprofitable servants who have “done those things which were commanded”? The answer is not far for right reason to seek. In the utmost we do in “working out our own salvation,” we cannot profit God. The benefit is all to ourselves. God condescends to count our faith and obedience for righteousness; but it is not for any advantage it is to Him. He is pleased with our submission, but not advantaged by it. We cannot advantage Him, for of Him, and to Him, and through Him are all things. Consequently, when we come to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ with ever so good an account of our stewardship, we can claim nothing on the score of services rendered. It is of the goodness of God we are permitted to serve, and it is of His goodness that service will be rewarded. The highest reason enjoins the attitude prescribed by Jesus. After we have done all that is commanded, we have only done our duty and have not profited God. In this sense, the accepted will acknowledge themselves unprofitable servants.

But in this there is no ground of consolation for those who are truly unprofitable. On the contrary, it forbids hope for such; for if those who have “done all those things which are commanded them,” are instructed to regard themselves as “unprofitable servants,” what is the position of those who have neglected “all those things which are commanded them,” and who have made self-interest their rule? “If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” The answer is plain: “Every man shall receive *according to his work*.” If a man live to the flesh, with the flesh, which is a perishing thing, he shall die. Only those who live to God, in the full affection of the Gospel and submission to all its requirements, may hope for favour in the day of eternal life. This is revealed, and however unpleasant some may find the reiteration of these things to be, it would be no true kindness to speak otherwise. He only speaks the word faithfully who declares the truth without regard to the likes or dislikes of men. The day will come—yea, is at the door, when the importance of these principles will be seen by every eye. It will be seen too late for the majority who “with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth,” will curse the folly which led them to give a secondary place to the true sayings of God. Our wisdom is to lay hold of them and exalt them and obey them now, while the long-suffering God waits as in the days of Noah. Soon our opportunity will be past. Soon will ring in the startled ear of the heedless, the solemn words which have been written a long time for our warning: “When I called, ye did not answer; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not. Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit. And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen” (Isa. 65: 12-15).

The Blessedness of Knowing the Truth

The blessedness of believing in Christ.—The work of God.—The blessedness principally future.—The reason of evil on earth.—The greatness of God and of sin.—The sacrifice of Christ.—Our approach to God.—Forgiveness and the coming change.—The purpose of evil.—Taking up the cross.—Hearers of the word, and doers.—God sends evil to punish and to correct.—The coming inspection.—The principle of its conduct.—The measure of obedience.—Many commandments.—Covering every action of life.—Scripture reading the antidote to the natural man.—Waiting for God.—What it consists in.—Faith only can act such a part.—Contravention of political economy.—Bible neglecters.—Waiting for God a painful part, soon to be no more.

JESUS said to his disciples, "Blessed are the eyes that see those things that ye see, and the ears that hear those things that ye hear." In a sense this is true of all who are assembled as we are this morning in faith and hope of our Lord Jesus, around the memorial table of his appointment. We have not seen with our own eyes or heard with our own ears the things referred to by Jesus; but we have seen through the eyes and heard through the ears of the disciples, in believing their testimony, and in this consists the blessedness. We believe on Christ through their word; and him having not seen, in this way we love. This is the most acceptable thing we can perform towards God. It is in fact, pre-eminently, the work that God has required of men—that they believe on him whom He hath sent, always taking it for granted that such belief ripens into love and obedience; for a belief that does not lead to works, is unfruitful and not accepted. Christ's summary of the matter is contained in the words, "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and do it."

Wherein consists the blessedness? Does it consist in present results? Partly, but principally, it is future. The blessedness is not yet manifest. The manifestation of it is only a matter of time, and that time a short time. It seems long to us because of present evil, but in relation to the great facts around us, it is but a short time. At the longest, it cannot be longer than a human life, because there is no time to the dead. And what is our life? "It is even a vapour," as James says, "that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." We realize this when we look back upon the ages that are past. These bore in their bosom multitudes of busy people that are now but a memory. Our turn in the great procession has come, and we are busy, like our predecessors, walking off the scene. But we cannot, like them, look forward to ages of the same unceasing vanity. We are at the time of the end when the mystery of God is about to be finished, as He hath declared to His servants the prophets. Nevertheless, in itself our life is a transitory thing. Few and evil are the days of the years of our pilgrimage. We are strangers and sojourners as all the fathers are. At last will come great blessing and joy.

Meanwhile, we must endure our evil lot with patience. It is a necessary part in God's great plan. And it yields its own great lessons to every truly reflective mind. Why has the world for so many ages groaned in an evil

SEASONS OF COMFORT

state? Why have weakness, pain, misery and death prevailed so long? There is a reason. God's ways are not as man's ways: they are larger than man's ways, as heaven is higher than the earth; and aim at far greater results, and are founded upon principles that do not enter into human calculation. God could have peopled the earth with human immortals at the start, as easily as He produced the insect swarms that plagued Egypt; but two things would have lacked—human joy and divine honour. It is necessary to know evil to appreciate good, and God gives not His highest gift unless He be glorified. An experience of evil upon earth was necessary to prepare the way for the right reception and enjoyment of that blessing of all families of the earth which was covenanted to Abraham. But perhaps this is the smallest lesson. We easily learn this. The other and the highest lesson is the most difficult for the natural man to learn. The reign of evil tells us that God is great—that man cannot trifle lightly with His word. Six thousand years ago He was disobeyed, and this was the cause of the curse that has blighted all things. It was but one offence: behold the ocean of mischief that has come from so small a spring, and we learn the greatness of the crime of insubordination to the will of God. The greatest work of the truth is to teach men this. Man is mortal for this. Christ died for this. We break not this bread and drink not this wine discerningly unless we see in Christ crucified the vindication of the honour of God, in the condemnation of sin in the flesh of sin as the basis of our acceptable approach to God, and our forgiveness unto life eternal. We come this morning with the Slain Lamb in our hands, so to speak; the priest, the risen Christ, takes it at our hands, and asks the Father for our acceptance, and the blessing comes forth in our forgiveness, and by and by, in the redemption of our body, which is the great consummation of our adoption. This corruptible, in God's good time, will taste the sweet experience of a sudden change to incorruptible health. It is only a question of time. Let us wait patiently. There shall be no more curse—no more death, by and by. God will wipe away every tear at the time appointed. For everything there is a season and a time. There is a time for sorrow; a time for evil. We have not done with evil yet, though called to be sons of God. Evil is a part of the means by which we are trained for the final adoption. Even the Lord Jesus, though he were a Son, learned obedience through the things which he suffered; and we have all to follow in his steps; for he was no substitute, but our forerunner, our Elder Brother. "What son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" Not one: ALL are partakers of needed chastisement by which we are made partakers of His holiness. In this way we suffer with him. If we suffer not, we are bastards and not sons. A man may run away from it. There is such a thing as "taking up" the cross, and not taking it up. Moses "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God," and he is a specimen of the true family. Men of this class do not make the preservation of their worldly well-being the first rule of their action. They know that if in this sense they save their lives, they will lose them. They make choice of Christ as the object of their life, which means a great deal that is disagreeable and self-sacrificing as regards present experience in personal surroundings and companionship. All are not wise in this matter. The wise only shall inherit glory. Each man will reap as he sows. If he serve himself, he will get the only wages that a man

can give to himself. If he serve Christ, he will have the reward that Christ comes to give to every man who faithfully serves him. There is no respect of persons with God. "Whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same he shall receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." These are the utterances of the Spirit of Truth. Men listen and say, "Beautiful!" but only a few are "doers of the word"; the others deceive their own selves, as they will discover when the judgment is set and the books opened under the presidency of him who said while on earth, "He that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened to a foolish man that built his house upon the sand." If any man say, "It is the same thing over and over again," let him remember that so it is with the Scriptures. There is a "sameness" about them all, but it is the sameness of the corn that is gathered every autumn—the same sound and healthy thing that gives life to the eater.

But besides the trouble a man may take, God sends trouble, as He sent to Job, that men may be tried and purified and made white. We may even receive a present punishment that we may escape the judgments of the wicked. Thus it was with the Corinthians to whom in their affliction Paul wrote (1 Cor. 11 : 32) : "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." When this trouble comes, it is sure to be something hard to bear; for this is the nature of trouble. You cannot have trouble that shall be pleasant; as Paul says, "No chastisement for the present is joyous, but grievous." The consolation is that if we be such as God regards (and He regards every man who knows Him and who, in a broken and contrite heart, trembles at His word) we can take thankfully from the hand of God whatever comes, whether trouble or blessing. If we commit our way to Him, He will direct our steps. This is a matter of revelation, and a thing to be realized and acted upon to the full. Jesus has told us that the hairs of our head are numbered, and that a sparrow cannot fall without the Father's knowledge. Faith tells a man, in view of this, to surrender himself without carefulness into the hands of God, committing the keeping of his soul to Him in well-doing as unto a faithful Creator.

By and by, the Lord who was the sacrifice for the sins of the world comes also as a judge. It is a beautiful arrangement. Through him the way was opened, and he is the way to its ultimate issues. God accepted him, and leaves him to administer the results as regards others. All judgment is committed to him. It rests with him at his coming as to which of us shall enter into life eternal. And of whom will he make choice. Will it depend on "influence"? Will he be influenced by favouritism? Nay, verily. Just will be his judgment, and without respect of persons. Yet his selection will be made on a definite principle. He has himself been made perfect through obedience; and being made perfect, he has become the author of eternal salvation to *all them that OBEY him* (Heb. 5 : 9). This is the class that will be chosen : *those who obey him*. We are here this morning in obedience of him.

We are believers in obedience of him; for this is the last great commandment that has come forth to men. Before his departure, he stood in presence of his disciples, and said, "All power is given unto me in heaven

SEASONS OF COMFORT

and in earth. Go ye therefore into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." We have heard the Gospel preached by the apostles in obedience to that command : we have been baptized, and we come here on the first day of the week to break bread in remembrance of him, in obedience of his commandment. Thus far we obey him ; but it needs not be said to those who are enlightened in the word, that this is very far from being the full measure of our obedience. He told the disciples to teach believers to observe " all things *whatsoever* he had commanded them." We have therefore to find out what all his commandments are. There are many, though they are not grievous. In their bearing, they cover every action of life, every hour of the day. We shall forget them unless we give earnest heed to the source of information. This earnest heed, to be profitable, must take the form of daily and attentive Scripture reading. By this practice alone, we shall come to belong to the blessed class described by David, who meditate on *His law* day and night. Any other course will leave us out in the cold. By constant and methodical reading, the law of God will come to be graven on our hearts, and we shall be able to say with the Psalmist, " Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee." Beware of the danger of supposing that because we have once known, it is no longer necessary to read diligently. A greater or more fatal mistake could not be made. While we are in the flesh, the natural mind is ever with us, spontaneously generating its own godless maxims, principles and feelings. Unless we oppose to these the constant antidote of Scripture reading, the natural mind will obtain the ascendant, even after we have known the way of righteousness. The mind is weak, the memory of divine things treacherous. If we are earnestly bent on working out our own salvation, we shall be earnestly devoted to the practice of daily devoting a portion of time to those things which have been written aforetime for our learning and profit. The neglect of this will ensure the decay of the best spiritual health that was ever enjoyed. This lesson cannot be too strongly insisted upon. Nothing should be allowed to interfere with it. It is our health—our life—our salvation. Give in to the likes of the natural man in this matter, and it will at last be your death. Give place to the demands of the Spirit in this matter, and it will be at last to your great peace and joy.

Only in this way can we now become properly of those who " wait for him." Waiting for God does not consist merely in lasting out the time of the tarrying. Millions will be alive at the Lord's coming who will " wait " in this way, but who will no more belong to the waiting class than the horses in the field. The nature and the manner of the waiting attitude is beautifully defined in the song to be sung in the land of Judah (Isa. 26) : "*In the way of thy judgments* have we waited for thee." " Judgments " is here equivalent to commandments and ordinances. The idea is that those who will rejoice in that day, saying, " Lo, this is our God ; we have waited for him," are those who now " wait " in the patient performance of what God has appointed. The expression is borrowed from the figure of one person waiting expectantly for the movements of another, as when a son patiently waits some kindness of his father which has been predicated on the son's pursuance of a certain course. Waiting for God is to wait the blessing He has promised, and not seek to secure it for ourselves. Thus we wait for Him in

“giving place unto wrath, not avenging ourselves,” because He has said, “I will repay.” We wait for Him in not prosecuting at law, in not mixing in the world’s politics, in not taking up the sword in obedience to the conscription laws that may come along, because He has commanded us to submit to evil, to take not the sword, to accept the place of strangers and pilgrims in an evil world, against the time when He will break in pieces the oppressor, place the sword of judgment in the hands of the saints, and give them the earth to inherit. There are some other things in which we wait for Him. We wait for Him in using what we have for His sake, instead of hoarding it, as the fearful and unbelieving do. We wait for Him in seeking not our own. We wait for Him in giving to the poor. We wait for Him in labouring not to be rich. We wait for Him in ministering the gift as every man has received, instead of bestowing it on our own exclusive comfort and good. We wait for Him in these things, because He has required them at our hands in test of our obedience, under promise of the day when He will transfer the wealth of the sinner to the just, and feed the hungry with good things when the rich are sent empty away. Obviously, it is only faith can accept such a part. A certain young man went away very sorrowful at the Lord’s doctrine because he had great possessions, which caused the Lord to remark that it was almost a matter of impossibility for the rich to be saved. True, we are not called upon to do what the young man was asked to do, but the principle of the calling to which we are called is the same. We are called to be the Lord’s property and the Lord’s servants in the doing of the Lord’s work in the day of his dishonour, in contravention of all known principles of “political economy.” We are called to do it on a principle which political economy does not recognize—faith. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it. The trial is great. Some are equal to it; some not. The latter class would run eagerly if the Lord himself appeared to them and said, “Do this and do that.” But they are as insensible as oysters to the actual obligations before their eyes. They are those who say when he comes, “Lord, when saw we thee naked, and clothed thee not?” They are not aware of their opportunities; they know not the day of their visitation; and they would hinder the course of those who are otherwise minded by cries of “extreme,” “indiscreet,” “extravagant.” They will bewail their folly when it is too late. The man waits not for God who avenges himself, pursues debtors in a court of law, takes part in the politics of an evil world, draws the sword at the bidding of the powers that be, or who lives for his own comfort and well-being, or lays up treasure for himself. The men who do these things are the Bible neglecters, not that they neglect the Bible professedly and openly, but practically they neglect the diligent study of the word, on some plea of moderation or other worldly-wise maxim. These men are most diligent in their attendance on the things of their body; no amount of attention in this line is “indiscreet,” but the things of God are considered out of their place if made the subject of even a fourth part of the thought and attention bestowed on wives, children, land, and houses. The reading of the Scriptures keeps in play a class of mental forces which enable a man to conquer, and to live as a good steward of the manifold grace of God. Assuredly none else will be invited to possess and administer the great trusts of the kingdom of God.

Waiting for God is a painful part meanwhile. It never was intended to be anything else. It involves self-denial on all hands. It makes those who accept it the poor, the sorrowful, the meek, the weeping, the weary, the hungry and thirsty, the broken down, the persecuted, the defamed, the disliked, and (in past times) the killed ; but the future of this class is so glorious that Jesus tells them to rejoice and be exceeding glad in the midst of their tribulations. Theirs is the turning of weeping into laughter ; theirs is the great joy of being, in the great day at hand, the manifested children of God with glory, honour, and immortality. Who would not, in view of such a coming reversal of position, choose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season !

Crotchets

Christ the only hope.—A sensible determination in view of this.—Christ and the truth synonymous.—Christ dwelling where the word dwells.—Degrees of attainment.—The wisdom of daily reading, as by the BIBLE COMPANION.—Wisdom in the treatment of topics.—Some matters “weightier” than others.—Crotchets and their tendency.—Fruit-producing truth to be contended for.—Such truth not crotchetarian.—The test by which the fruit is to be determined.—Things to be constantly affirmed.—Things to be left in abeyance.—Belief sufficient.—Comprehension not always possible.—The “how” not always knowable.—The fact of God’s working generally sufficient.—Especially His work in Christ.—Hurtful explanations.—Glorious facts to be received, even if apparently incompatible.—“Divine substance” and no-will crotchets.—Presumptuous metaphysics.—Obedience of Christ a fact to be received whatever we think of the “how.”—The testimony in its entirety and simplicity.—The carpers and the little children.—The well-being of the latter determines the policy to be pursued.—The end.

THIS morning it is our privilege again to call Christ to remembrance. He is our hope. Apart from him all is darkness and despair. There is nothing in Nature and nothing in the thousand devices that go to make up human society, that can emancipate us from the dominion of weakness, imperfection, and death. There is nothing apart from Christ that can deliver the world from the mass of abortive and worthless human life that now oppresses it ; nothing that can extricate it from the fatal entanglements of its own institutions ; nothing that can realize the pleasing picture of human brotherhood which poets delight to sing, and every cultivated mind contemplates with pleasure. In Christ the highest desires will at last be realized ; by him, the highest good will at last be accomplished for all the world—even glory to God in the highest, peace on earth, and goodwill to men.

In view of this, the determination of Paul was nothing more than a sensible one—to know nothing but Christ, and him crucified. It was but a

logical result of the truth in his mind that made him "count all things but dung that he might win Christ," and what was logical with him will not be illogical with us if we go to the same extreme. It is a reasonable exhortation from him to us that we let the word of Christ dwell in us *richly*. We are here this morning in the endeavour to obey that exhortation. The word of Christ requires continual putting in. It will never dwell richly in our leaky minds except by perseverance in this process. There are so many other things constantly competing for a place in our affections, and so great a natural tendency to "let slip" the things of God, that unless we deliberately and diligently give the truth the first place in the reading of the word and prayer, it will have a poor chance, and we shall run great danger of being in that class who are at last sentenced to be deprived of "even that which they have."

The "word of Christ" and "the truth" are synonymous terms. The truth is all about Christ; and the truth covers the whole extent of the holy oracles. Christ is the great subject-matter of the law and the prophets, as well as of the apostolic writings. The law and the prophets are unintelligible apart from him. He is the key and the foundation. Acquaintance with the Scriptures in their breadth and fulness—namely, the kind of acquaintance to be got from daily and untiring intimacy with them—will, therefore, result in the rich indwelling of the word of Christ, and in all the effects which that indwelling is calculated to produce on every well-balanced mind. Christ "dwelling in the heart by faith" will engrave the picture of Christ on a man's outer life.

In this matter there are, of course, degrees of attainment. John speaks of children, young men, and fathers in Christ. The matter is one admitting, in the same discipleship, of great variety of mental relation to it—the utmost profundity of understanding on the one hand, and the simple exercise of child-like and uncomprehending faith on the other. Yet these varying conditions in believers have a common basis—faith and obedience. They all believe the testimony of God, and are all distinguished by "the doing of His commandments." This is the family likeness. This is the one feature we ought to aim at cultivating. It is one that will grow under a right process of treatment.

There is a wrong process of treatment possible in this as in everything. It is possible to yield to fits of intense application, to be followed by intervals of lassitude and spiritual aversion. Some let weeks roll on without reading their daily portion of Scripture, thinking to make it up by reading a great deal more on some particular day. Both these are mistakes. We cannot feed healthily either in body or mind, by the plan of gorging. A steady supply, day by day, in quantity suited to our needs and capacities, is the method that leads to strength. A pertinacious adherence to the plan of daily reading an allotted portion (as by the *Bible Companion*)—a practice now happily common—will be found the best way to spiritual health.

Wisdom is also needed with regard to the treatment of the topics brought under our notice in the reading of the Scriptures. Some things are more important than others. Jesus spoke of "the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith," in contrast with the subject of tithes, which was also scriptural in its place. A similar distinction will be found to exist in other cases. The nature of Paul's thorn, for instance, is

SEASONS OF COMFORT

an admissible subject of occasional speculation, but is not for a moment to be placed side by side with Paul's "doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience." So the question of what became of the saints who came out of their graves after their resurrection (Matt. 27 : 52) is not to be mentioned in importance with the fact of Christ's resurrection. Who was the devil that disputed about the body of Moses is of little consequence compared with the question, Who was the devil Christ destroyed in his death? (Heb. 2 : 14). So whether Christ was tall or short, comely or forbidding, auburn or dark, are points which, though involved in the Scripture narrative, are without any value as compared with the fact of Christ's appearance in the flesh, and his invitation by Paul to the Gentiles to become partakers of the covenanted goodness of God.

There are many other such things, which, even if true, being without practical value, become "crotchets" when exalted out of their place. They are matters of barren definition. Why "barren"? Because unproductive of fruitfulness to God. Some things induce spiritual fruitfulness and some have not effect one way or other. It is testified that "the goodness of God *leadeth* to repentance." Repentance is, in this case, a fruit springing from the goodness of God perceived and believed. It is a result produced in the mind by a hearty belief that God is, and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him. The fact of God's goodness is not "barren"; it is fruit-producing. It leads a man to be and to do what he otherwise would not. It is, therefore, most important to be known and maintained; and for any man to interfere with it—for any man to teach that God is not a rewarder of men at all, would be to interfere with the vital fruit-producing element of the testimony of God; and true men would oppose him and contend earnestly for the thing denied; and the thing so contended for by true men would not be a crotchet, but a matter of the utmost moment as affecting the well-being of God and man.

But suppose, for the sake of example, a man were to affirm that the cross on which Christ was crucified was a tree in the shape of a cross, and not the piece of carpentry usually represented in pictures, he would be contending for something perfectly unimportant, and, therefore, not to be particularly opposed by earnest men. The subject would be a scriptural subject, but of no vital moment; because it is a matter of perfect indifference what the particular configuration of the "accursed tree" was on which God condemned sin in the flesh, in the crucifixion of His Son. A man pertinacious on the point would be a crotchetarian, hurtful alike to himself and all who should be troubled by his profitless strife of words.

Such a case will, of course, be considered a very unlikely one to arise; but the principle it illustrates is most important to recognize, and may, in fact, be necessary of application in unsuspected directions. Many "questions" may be scriptural questions in the sense of relating to matters spoken of in the Scriptures, and may yet be entirely unprofitable or vain, as matters of discourse or contention. Which questions are of this character and which are not, may be settled by the test of fruitfulness: are they or are they not of a character to incline the mind to obedience and the love of God? Do they or do they not affect comfort, hope, faith, mercy, and righteousness? Have they or have they not any tendency to influence our attitude towards the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ? As a rule, it will not be difficult to

answer these questions, and by the answer a wise man's action will abide. There were some things that Paul was anxious that Titus should "constantly affirm," and there were others which he called "foolish and unlearned questions"—strivings about the law, etc.—which he advised both Timothy and Titus, and, therefore, all brethren everywhere, to "avoid," as having no profit in them, but calculated rather to "subvert the hearers."

There are not lacking such questions today. They are principally questions of ways and means in relation to the work of God in Christ, alike beyond the comprehension of all who discuss them. What should we think of a man who, not content with the shining of the sun, neglects the cultivation of his fields to enforce upon his neighbours some theory of how God makes it to shine? Surely it is sufficient to be able to see the sun, and to believe that it is the work of God to whom we give thanks. The crop does not depend upon the farmer's comprehension of how it grows. If it did, there would be no crop: for no man can comprehend the mode of vegetable generation any more than he does the shining of the sun. It is the same as to the Sun of Righteousness. We see him shine; we believe him to be the work of God; we thank God for him. But as for comprehending the "how," we can only pity those who ask us to waste our time in the discussion of the question.

It is sufficient to believe the testimony concerning Christ—that he was the Word made flesh—that according to the flesh he was the seed of David—that he came down from heaven—that he learned obedience by the things that he suffered, and that because of his obedience he was highly exalted, and that he will come the second time unto the salvation of all that obey him. These are the fruit-producing facts of the case. They are all of them mentally-inducive elements of reverence, love, obedience, hope, and comfort. But when we are asked to sanction some definition of "how" as a matter of literal, scientific, metaphysical process this dayspring from on high hath visited us, we are at once in the region of the incomprehensible and impracticable; for not only can we not know, but even if we could, it would be of no practical value. It is not the comprehension of divine modes, but the doing of His will that commends us to God. We cannot know the divine modes. When He works, it is sufficient to believe that He works. It is bootless to trouble ourselves as to the "how." This is true in things natural; how much more in things spiritual. We believe He made heaven and earth; we know not how. By His Spirit truly, but this does not define the process; which is incomprehensible to man. We believe He will raise the dead; we know not how; and it is useless to trouble ourselves with the question. We see, we feel, we live, we know not how, though some think they know.

It is sufficient to take the facts and be thankful. We believe Jesus was God manifest in the flesh; we know not how; by the Spirit truly; but this tells us no more metaphysically than the similar answer as to heaven and earth. It merely tells us that God was the worker: it cannot communicate to us a knowledge of the mode. We need not know; the fact is sufficient. It is the denial of the fact that is serious. Some think to simplify the fact by saying it was through the presence of "divine substance" in the body of Christ attributable to his begettal. This is objectionable on every ground. It ignores the fact that everything is based on divine sub-

SEASONS OF COMFORT

stance (understanding the Spirit to be meant by that phrase), and that the nature of a thing is not determinable by the presence of the Spirit, which is everywhere, but by the will of the Creator, of which the Spirit is the medium and means. It would logically divorce God and His works. It would exclude the Spirit from all His works we see. It would degrade the Spirit and its great Source to a level with fixed elements having helpless mechanical properties and chemical affinities, instead of recognizing the absolute prerogative of the Spirit in all its works. And, finally, it would negative the testimony that Jesus was a son of Abraham, of our own nature, made in all things like to us.

Inculcating such a narrow view of the matter is mischievous enough, but the insistence upon others consenting to the definition is worse. It becomes crotcheterianism of a very hurtful description. The remedy lies in believing the testimonies on both sides of the subject, and meddling not with a phase of the question which belongs to God and to God only. God knows how the glorious marvel was achieved ; He does not ask us to understand this, but believe. We can easily believe that Jesus was God manifest in the flesh, while yet believing the testimony that He was physically what we are. It is in the power of God to blend the two facts. We have simply to receive them both. It is certainly impossible to do this while holding a view that renders one of them nugatory, by teaching that Jesus was not our flesh and our bones, but a mixed nature unknown to human experience.

So also on another, yet kindred subject, embarrassment is created by insistence on a view derived from one phase of the subject only, to the exclusion of another equally important in its place, and with which it is not inconsistent, though apparently so. The fact that God was in Christ is made to yield the hurtful conclusion that Christ had no will of his own, and was not put to the proof, and did not, by the power of faith, overcome the temptations of the flesh to which we are subject. The mistake lies in not allowing due force to all the testimony in the case. It is a glorious fact that the Father was in Jesus by the measureless and abiding presence of the Spirit ; but it is also true that Jesus had a separate individuality of his own, which he voluntarily subordinated to the will of the Father who sent him. Both facts are testified, yea, both are evident in the whole life of the Lord Jesus ; and both are to be received. It is a presumptuous use of reason to deduce a " sequence " from one of the facts that is destructive of the other fact. It comes of trying to explain the " how." The reasoner says, " If Christ was the Word made flesh I cannot see *how* he had a will of his own. If Christ, by his own will, rendered the perfect obedience of his life, I cannot see *how* it was the work of God : and if it was not the work of God, I cannot see *how* the flesh is excluded from glorying." The argument is altogether a mistake. Instead of simply accepting the testimony of God as to the facts of the case (that is, *all* the testimony), it assumes our ability to judge of the operations of the Deity in a metaphysical sense, and, on this presumption, pronounces against a truth as much declared as the one which is made the basis of the adverse verdict. And further, the alleged difficulties are only imaginary, and result from inaccurate reasoning. The individualization of the Eternal Word in a man, instead of excluding the notion of a personal and independent volition, rather seems to involve it, for the result was the appearance of a new personage on the scene—the Son of God who,

“though he were a Son, learnt obedience by the things that he suffered” (Heb. 5 : 8). The rendering of perfect obedience by such a man was surely the work of God, since the man who could render such obedience had to be expressly produced by God ; and seeing “the flesh,” viewed historically and racially, could never have brought such a Deliverer to the birth, surely the flesh has no share in the glory of the deliverance. It remains absolutely true that “of God, he (Christ) is made unto us righteousness.”

There ought to be no difficulty in receiving and rejoicing in the whole truth of the matter. There would be none if men were content to receive the testimony in its entirety and simplicity. The absence of this disposition always has led to the agitation of “untaught” and hurtful “questions,” ever since the day that the sublime mystery of godliness was placed in the world by the ministry of the apostles ; and probably the same effect will be visible to the very end of the present miserable chapter. On the other hand, there are always those who receive the kingdom of God and its righteousness as little children, and who rejoice before God in thanksgiving for the blessed hope it brings them. For their sakes it is profitable, in the midst of so much carnal carping and strife, to “preach the Word, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect ; not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth ; being instant in season, out of season, reproving, rebuking, exhorting, with all long-suffering and doctrine,” affirming constantly that they who have believed in God ought to be careful to maintain good works, which are good and profitable unto men.

The time is short. The scene will suddenly be changed in a short time ; and all these matters will appear in their true light to every one. Many will discover that they have been wasting their time and hurting their brethren by bootless and embittering controversy, instead of redeeming the evil days by the consolations of the truth. They will see too late that instead of imbibing the sincere milk of the word, they have been feeding on ashes ; that instead of dispensing a portion of meat to the household in due season, they have been giving them gall and vinegar ; that instead of strengthening the hands of fellow-labourers, they have been casting stumbling-blocks in the paths of the weak, and discouraging the hearts of the strong ; that instead of rejoicing in the Lord, they have been fretting their souls with barren contentions ; that instead of filling up a good account with works of humility and mercy and faith, they have been sowing a harvest of envy and strife and every evil fruit ; that instead of helping to purify a peculiar people, zealous of good works, their influence has been only mischievous, and that continually—obstructing the work of the Lord, pulling down the work already done, and throwing clouds and darkness over the beacon intended to guide the feet of the stranger to life eternal. Let us aim to be out of the ranks of this number, that the Lord, at his coming, may approve our faithfulness in small things and give us higher work to do.

Griefs

The griefs that underlie the present state.—Deceptive appearances.—The lesson when friends die.—The wise and the foolish.—The shadow of death.—Comfort and consternation.—Only one wise course.—Living after the Spirit.—Vanity of every other course.—Dispiriting views after forty.—Nothing to fall back on in the absence of the truth.—The contrary position.—Making salvation sure.—Doing the will of God.—Becoming acquainted with it first, and how this is to be done.—The present drawbacks.—Social hermits.—Spiritual endurance.—Divine magnanimity.—Stewardship in all our positions and endowments.—Cheerful exercise thereof.—Unpleasant well-doing.—Seeing Him who is invisible.

THAT which has induced us to come together, brethren and sisters, is our knowledge of the griefs that underlie this present state of existence. Without a knowledge of them, we should fail to appreciate the great provision symbolized on the table. Those griefs are not always visible. Our surroundings deceive us sometimes. The occupations of health have a tendency, in the merely secular sight, to hide from view the evils that are gnawing at the vitals of human existence. All of us are more or less liable to this blindness. But when, as occasionally happens, we see those with whom we are familiar and whom we love, drawn aside from the path of active life, and laid down in the corner to die, and ultimately deposited in the unseen place from which no human being ever emerges by nature, we are made to feel our real state, which, at its best, is "vanity"; and we are enabled to see more clearly than ever, that the truth which we have set our minds upon is the only truly valuable thing there is. Everything else is worthless in itself, however good it may appear at the time. It ultimately vanishes from sight. Men are wise or foolish in proportion as they act upon the recognition of this fact—that the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which (now) are not seen are eternal. At the critical junctures of life men feel their position in this matter. When, in any shape, we come under the shadow of death, we feel how wise or how foolish we have been. If when we get there, we feel comforted in spirit, having the answer of a good conscience, and view with satisfaction the prospect of lying down to the shortest of sleeps, which will terminate all the relations of this life for ever, and introduce us without a conscious interval to those higher relations of being that will open with the resurrection—then probably our course in the truth has been a wise one. But if on the other hand, you shrink from the cloud and cling to the life of the flesh, if you feel disconcerted and out of harmony with the great change, if you would rather turn your eyes from the future and fix them with desire upon things connected with the little time allotted to this mortal state—then there is reason to revise our course. There is only one course that is really wise, and that is, modelling life in harmony with what is to be and not with what is. Let us give this Word of God a supreme place in our lives. Living after the flesh, we shall die, but if we, through the Spirit, subdue the waywardness and corruptness

of the natural man, we shall live. Such as are after the flesh, do *mind the things of the flesh* : such as are after the Spirit, *the things of the Spirit* (Rom. 8 : 5). Here is a great criterion by which to judge ourselves. Let us give ourselves entirely to the things presented to our view in the word of the Spirit. A half course is madness. It involves the sacrifice of the present and the loss of the future. We know him who has said, that except a man surrender all, he cannot be his disciple. We must treat ourselves and all we have as the property of Christ. Thus only can we lay up for ourselves a store against the time to come. Life in any other fashion will be of no value to us. Treasure otherwise bestowed, is lost, as many will see in that day when, too late, they will bewail their folly with weeping and gnashing of teeth. Every achievement, every attainment, every distinction we may work out in the secular sphere, or accomplishment we may acquire—and it is astonishing the amount of time and energy expended upon accomplishments which are of no solid use whatever, but dictated solely by “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life”—will die with the efflux of time. Only Christ remains—the same yesterday, today, and for ever. The inutility of ordinary human pursuits becomes apparent even now. After forty, people begin to look at the serious side of things, though truly some persons never look at that side at any age, as some do at an earlier age. But taking the ordinary run of mankind, when the meridian of life is passed, things in general begin to appear in their true colours, and the result is generally dispiriting. Most men live for transient purposes, and the consequence is, as the interest of those purposes wears off—having nothing to fall back upon—they sink into an insipid state, which, having no purpose or hope, has no nobility and no joy. On how many thousands of countenances is this condition depicted? The practical bearing of this is obvious. Nothing profits in the end but the truth. A life in this will be ever green and flourishing—even now. While the outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day by day. But if secular objects only are pursued, there will be no inward man to renew, and all will be desolation when the inevitable period arrives for the decay of all pertaining to the outward man. The truth is the only thing whereby we can be discharged from the grave, ever remembering, of course, that this deliverance will not be given to those merely knowing the truth; it will be reserved for the class of people who answer to the characteristics described by Peter in the chapter read (1 Pet. 4). You will find he recommends a certain attitude to be observed by believers, in this present life. He says, that as Christ has suffered for us in the flesh, we are to arm ourselves with the same mind, for he that hath suffered in the flesh *hath ceased from sin; that he should no longer live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God*. There is no ambiguity about this. The meaning is plain. Those who are heirs of life, in so far as they acquire a title by connection with Christ, are to make their heirship sure, by walking after the course indicated. Their time, after coming to the knowledge of the truth, is not to be spent in “the lusts of men,” but in doing the will of God. Great stress is laid in all the Scriptures on this feature—the *doing of the will of God*. Jesus brings it out forcibly when he says to certain, “Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and *do not the things which I say? He that DOETH the will of my Father*, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.” So does James: “Be ye *doers of the word* and not

SEASONS OF COMFORT

hearers ONLY." The rule of action is therefore exceedingly simple. Are we acting in conformity with Christ? Are we doing the will of God? This is a simple question that will enable everybody to test himself. The will of God is luminously indicated, and it will be our fault if we ignore the many features of it affecting practical life. Learning that will, our labour should daily be to harmonize our walk with what is written. The principal part of this labour lies in a matter we have often to speak of. If men would be doers of the will of God, they must be familiar with it; it must be written upon their hearts, so that in the exigencies of life, they will not need to refer to it, as to a lexicon or a concordance. In only one way can this condition be reached in our day. In only one way can the will of God become a living law within us. We are not to expect illumination except in the way God has given it. He has sent His servants to make His will known. He has told us plainly and elaborately what He would have us to do, and what kind of people He would have us be; and all we have to do is to make ourselves acquainted with what He has said. This requires continual reading, without discouragement, with great perseverance, of the things that God has caused to be written for our instruction. By this means, the divine law will in course of time work into our nature, and become written in our hearts—a living power within, which will outwardly manifest itself in the doing of the will of God. Adopting this course, we may hope to follow out the course described in Peter's words—no longer living the rest of our time to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. This is a course which at present is beset with much that is the opposite of pleasure. Although the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will be amongst our experiences, our comfort will be somewhat tried by the social penalties involved. Doing the will of God means being a social hermit, for the friend of God is necessarily isolated from "society" in all its pursuits and pleasures; he is thrust into a corner; he has to occupy himself with work and with people that yield no present gratification; his endurance is much put to test; he has no continuing city. This has been the position of all the servants of God from the beginning; he has to think of this and take courage. "Above all things," says Peter, "have fervent charity among yourselves." This is a needful exhortation. We are in a very disjointed condition at present. Men are on all hands imperfect, and, of course, brethren too; and if we do not clothe ourselves with something of divine magnanimity that puts up with the frailties and shortcomings of men, we shall never get on at all. We have to shut our eyes to a great deal. We need not give countenance to faults, but we must not be too critical: we must forbear much and pass things by, or we shall only make a bad job worse. Charity hides a multitude of sins. It exhibits solicitude towards one's neighbour; it looks not only to one's own things, but about the things of others; and is rather prone to put a good construction (where such is possible) upon a man's actions, than a bad one. As Paul declares, "Charity thinketh no evil, and is not easily provoked."

"Use hospitality one to another without grudging," continues Peter; "*as every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*" This exhortation contains an idea that is also full of good sense, the realization of which would often enable people to act a more sensible part than they do. Everything a man

has, he is indebted to God for, inasmuch as by whatever means he has acquired it, those means have been bestowed upon him, in one way or another, by the permission or action of the Deity. If a man procure a position through his talents, he is as much indebted to the source of his being, as if the position were conferred without the interposition of those talents leading to it ; for those talents have been bestowed upon him ; he did not create them himself. If, again, he has favourable connection with trade, or is related to opulent people, by whom he gets position and substance, he is again a beneficiary of God, for the circumstances leading to the substance were not his own contriving. If he accumulates a fortune by industry, there is no more ground for boasting than if God had put the money in his hand, because he has been fortunately constituted upon a principle that has enabled him to be industrious. Everything a man has he has received, and therefore he ought to be modest in his use thereof, and kindly in his attitude to the less fortunate. This a brother of Christ will be, acting as a good steward in those things that constitute to him the favour of God. In everything in which he can do good, he must do good without grudging. Well-doing begrudged is absurd. A man brings nothing into the world, and can take nothing out. He is only a steward of what belongs to God. A cheerful exercise of his stewardship is sensible and well-pleasing to God. Nothing else will be accepted. To do it, requires determination. Such a man will often have to act against his feelings. If we wait till a duty is pleasant before we do it, we shall often fail, and arrive at the end of the journey with a barren life to look back to. Pleasure, even in the matter of duty, is an uncertain star to steer by. If we steer by it, we are sure to go wrong. What we have to do is to consider the things that are right, and to do them. Do not do them because it will please anybody else ; but in your own mind cultivate the habit of seeing Him who is invisible, and acting from the force of that consideration. If you do that, you will keep always at work, from one year's end to another, under all circumstances. If the principle of your action is the love of God, you won't be driven off the line. If you are driven off by a wrong twist of affairs, you are not the right sort of man : you were acting from some side consideration. The truth in its naked force was not your bond, and you will have no ground of complaint if Jesus tells you at the last, that as you were unfaithful in that which is least, you are not fit to be entrusted with the great things of the age to come.

A Warning Message

The messages to the seven churches.—Sardis.—Christ's omniscience.—The day of disclosure.—The honour of Divine confession.—Having a name to live, yet dead.—The criterion of spiritual life.—What it is not, and what it is.—Applying the rule.—The parable of the fig tree.—The Lord's own exhortation and encouragement.—Try again.—Forgiveness.—The contrary case.—Only "a few names."—The undefiled garments.

WHAT has been written is for "our learning," so Paul says, and so the Scriptures themselves show. They are "profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness." This we find to be true. But specially profitable in those respects are the messages of the Lord Jesus to the ecclesias flourishing in the days when John was an exile in Patmos. Though sent to seven in particular, it is evident they were intended for all, from the conclusion of each message—"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches." And what was intended for all the ecclesias in A.D. 96 must be found to contain some instruction for those existing A.D. 1873. The seven were doubtless chosen as representing seven different conditions, comprising all the states in which an ecclesia could be recognized to exist, and, therefore, affording occasion for advice applicable to every age and every state.

Sardis is particularly before us in the chapter read. The One Body in the city receives first this solemn assurance: "I KNOW THY WORKS." Here, at once, is matter for wholesome reflection. Jesus, our High Priest now, and Judge to be, is not one who depends for knowledge on what he may see and hear as man sees and hears. He requires not to be told how it is with us—he *knows*: he did this even in the days of his flesh, as it is written (John 2 : 25), "He needed not that any should testify of man, for he knew what was in man." He knows now as he knew then; he knew *in his spirit* (Mark 2 : 8) what was passing in the thoughts of the Pharisees. He is now the Lord THE SPIRIT, without a flesh veil. When he speaks, it is what *the Spirit saith* unto the churches. He designs that all the churches should know this. His words are, "All the churches shall know I am he that searcheth the reins and hearts." We are no less known of Christ than we are known of the Father; he is the Father in manifestation. All things are naked and open to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. We have to do with the Lamb with seven horns and SEVEN EYES: omniscience incarnate, great but glorious mystery; none the less credible that we cannot understand it.

Jesus, then, could say to every ecclesia, "I know thy works." This is a comfort to all who are labouring with an eye to him, and a terror to such as seek only to make a fair show in the eyes of men and brethren; because Christ not only knows the real state of all cases, but in due time he will declare it. There is a day appointed when he will "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart" (1 Cor. 4 : 5). In that day will be fulfilled the promise made to such in Sardis as should overcome: "I will confess his name before my Father,

and before his angels." This promise is to all who overcome, not only in Sardis, but everywhere else. The honour of such a confession can scarcely be appreciated now. It will be seen and felt by all then, and by none more than by those who make light of it at present, as a thing not to be taken practically into account; they will, when too late, curse the infatuation that shall have cheated them of the unspeakable honour of favourable mention by the King of Glory in the audience of the Eternal One, and an angelic and all-powerful assembly of immortals.

But what did Jesus know of the Sardian ecclesia? "Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." Here sad thoughts arise; for if in the days of the beloved disciple—the gifts of the Spirit still flourishing—an ecclesia could be dead, what may we not fear in the nineteenth century, so far removed from the apostolic fountain of the Gospel? Sardis had "a name to live": the ecclesia would appear from this to have been in good repute among the brethren—known and spoken about as a thriving, healthy, model ecclesia, probably because the brethren would be energetic and friendly. Yet, by infallible Wisdom, they were pronounced "dead." This suggests the wonder what the Lord's verdict would be were he to speak his mind about the ecclesias of our day. What would he say of Birmingham? We have a name to live. We are spoken well of by brethren here and there in the country as a lively, thriving ecclesia. But what is the fact as discerned by the eyes of Omniscience? Well, we cannot have the answer now. We must examine our own selves. What is the criterion of "life" in the case? Is it well-attended meetings? Not necessarily. Well-attended meetings are so far a good sign; but people may come to meetings from various causes apart from spiritual life. To come to the meeting is a pleasant variation from the monotony of home; it is an agreeable stimulus to the sociable faculties; it is possibly an entertainment in some senses. Well-filled benches do not necessarily indicate a spiritually-sound condition, though it is good to see the benches well filled, especially at the appointed hour.

Is great animation and friendliness among the brethren a sign that we are not of those who have "a name to live and are dead"? Not necessarily: friendliness as such is instinctive with those who have what the phrenologists call "adhesiveness" largely developed. A man with a good stock of animal vitality and a large social brain, may be demonstratively friendly without a particle of spiritual life. As sister Lasius said in her recent article on "Union and Unity," that "spiritual life does not always flourish accompanied with a high degree of animal spirits." We are not, therefore, to flatter ourselves that because we shake hands and smile and enquire cordially concerning each other's welfare, we are full of spiritual life. God forbid that I should seek to lessen our cordiality in this sense. Rather let us seek to excel in this as in every other excellence. Still, let us not mistake the manifestation of what may be but natural friendliness for that state of mind that the Lord would pronounce "life" as opposed to the death that reigned in Sardis.

Are we to find it in doctrinarian zeal and proneness to controversy in defence of the faith once for all delivered to the saints? Not necessarily. No ecclesia is in a state of spiritual life that gives place to error, or lacks courage and enterprise in that contention for the faith which is prescribed: but it is

SEASONS OF COMFORT

possible to argue from pugnacity and to delight in the polemics of the truth while in the very depths of spiritual death.

Where then are we to look for the indications of the real state of the ecclesia? The answer is, on the individual lives of the brethren and sisters. Let us follow them in their dispersion during the week, and ask how they act when thrown upon their own resources. What do they do with their leisure time and their surplus money? How do they transact their business or do their work? Do they continue instant in prayer, abounding therein with thanksgiving? Are they ready to every good work? Are they merciful to the poor and the penitent? Are they men of truth and honour? Have they the fear of God before their eyes? Are the commandments a law with them which they fear to break? Do they keep their promises, and are they punctual to their engagements? Are they bold to confess Christ before men, and forward to say "come" to those whom God may bring within their reach?

Or, instead of being servants of Christ, are they servants of themselves, —having a name to live, and are dead? Do they work only that their business may prosper and their private resources increase? Do they think only of their houses and their families? Do their sympathies never go beyond their own door? Does the Word of God go neglected in their houses while they bestow all their energies on business or work, or friends or family, or pleasure? Do they never practise thanksgiving? Do they cast prayer behind their back? Do they never put their hand to disinterested work—work for the good of others or pleasing of God? Do they do as other people do in business, acting as if they had no Master in heaven who will bring them to account? Are they destitute of faith; absorbed with the question, "What shall we eat, what shall we drink"? Is their enthusiasm dead to everything but questions of personal advantage? Have they no likeness to Christ, who came not to be ministered unto but to minister? Do they show no likeness to the Elder Brother, whose meat was to do the will of the Father? Do they, unlike him, resist evil, resent injuries, go to law, and take part in the world's politics and social devices? Do they never realize that they are strangers and pilgrims, and stewards of the goodness of God, and that that stewardship relates to their private selves and their private affairs? And that if they are not found faithful in these "least" things, they will not be accounted worthy of that calling with which they have been called?

These are some of the questions that would determine whereabouts an ecclesia stands in the matter of having a name to live and being dead. Let us try ourselves by them. They constitute the measure by which the Lord will measure the work of every man when the day of decision comes. If we apply it now, our work will have the better chance of passing then. If we find the work short, let us seek to rectify it. The message to Sardis gives good encouragement in this direction: "Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die." Christ is not an austere and unjust judge. Like the Father, with whom he is one, he is long-suffering and slow to anger. He is patient with the erring, and gives them "space to repent," and exhortation too. His relation to us all may be taken as illustrated in his own parable of the fig tree (Luke 13 : 6). Three years the proprietor of the vineyard sought fruit on it, and then gave orders that it should be cut down

as a cumberer of the ground. The dresser of the vineyard said, "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it : and *if it bear fruit, well : and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*" A fair chance for every fig tree ! Let us look round and be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain. This is Christ's exhortation to every one that "hath an ear to hear." If any have lost their first ardour, or been entangled in sin, or have been discouraged by the evil of the times, let them take heart again at the comforting counsel of the Lord. "Be watchful, and strengthen the things that remain, that are ready to die." It may be that the "things that remain" will take root again and recover the life that is ready to die. What even if that is applicable to us that he says to Sardis : "I have not found thy works perfect before God" ; let us listen again : "Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and *hold fast, and repent.*" This is the Spirit's counsel, and it is for "him that hath ears to hear." There is no good to be done by giving in to failure. Some fall and incline to lie where they fall. This is a mistake. Let them get up and try again. We do not stand where Adam stood. One offence brought ruin on him ; he had no High Priest ; we have, and we are invited to make confession of our failures and trespasses and try again. Obtaining forgiveness, we are to "hold fast and repent," not losing hope, yet putting ourselves on a strict guard, for, with this, Christ is well pleased. If, on the contrary, we abandon hope and give ourselves up to the world, we seal our own doom ; for hear what was said to Sardis : "If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" ; that is, Christ, working in what are called the ways of Providence, would invisibly compass their destruction, if they did not take up that position of anxious vigilance which the situation, in all respects, called for. He would cut down the barren fig tree. This is a lesson to us. If we diligently and anxiously improve our standing in the things of the Spirit, "doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God," we shall be assisted from behind the veil in ways not visible to man. Blessing will attend us in our spiritual concerns, even though it take the shape sometimes of chastening evil ; all things will work together for good. But if we are like Sardis, and desert our watchfulness, and become enamoured of ourselves and our doings, and forgetful of the spirit of the calling, which is a spirit of gratitude and humility before God, they will work against us spiritually, and work out our destruction. This is true of individuals and communities bearing the name of Christ. The seven messages show it. Wisdom quickly points the lesson.

"Thou hast a few names even in Sardis that have not defiled their garments." The ecclesia in Sardis was, probably, a large community, and each member in it would be satisfied with his membership, as giving him a good standing in Christ ; yet here is the Lord's declaration that only a few among them were well pleasing to him. If it was so with Sardis, may it not be so with us ? Undoubtedly it may, and probably is so. Let us realize the idea, and ask ourselves, what class of believers is he pleased with ? In Sardis, it was those who had not defiled their garments. In Birmingham it will be no different. This is, of course, the language of figure, but the figure is plain. Garment, as a figure, represents character. To keep ourselves unspotted from the world is to keep our garments clean. Fine linen, clean and white, is the righteousness of saints (Rev. 19 : 8). Those in Sardis, who

were pronounced "worthy," were those who walked in the truth, filled with it, governed by it, conformed to it in their entire "walk and conversation"; men who walked with God, not living to themselves, but to him who died for them—passing the time of their sojourning in fear, in the world but not of it, having here no continuing city, but looking for one to come. Those in every place who belong to this Sardian "few" will join them in the great day of muster, and walk with them in white, for "he that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment"—the symbol of the new and clean nature imparted to all who are made the subject of the promised transformation by the Spirit. If some from Birmingham are found in the company, it will be because they have made the word their portion, and imitated the few in Sardis, in keeping clean their garments from the surrounding pollution. God grant there may be many such from all parts of the country. Let us be watchful and strengthen the things that remain.

The Beauty of Christ

The love of Christ.—The beauty of Christ.—His moral portrait.—Partial views of him.—Umparalleled personage.—The highest name.—The coming man.—His eclipsing glory.—When the fading world has faded.—Christ in human life.—The eternal inheritance.—No tire with the spirit body.—The breaking of bread.—Its profitableness and necessity.—Its significance.—The neglect of it, disobedience.—Unity the basis of it.—The table of the Lord no place for discussion.—True saintship, having the full assurance of faith.—Foolish questions, and edifying affirmation.—Looking after the house of God.

Once again assembled at the breaking of bread, we do this "till he come." It is in remembrance of him whom we have heard, and of whom we are able to say, "Whom having not seen, we love." The love of Christ is not a mere phrase with the true saint; it is a reality—the leading sentiment of his mind. He can say with Paul, "The love of Christ constraineth me." There is not a more powerful motive among men—nay, I will say, that as regards enduring effort and unconquerable perseverance, there is no motive among men at all equal to the love of Christ. Nothing binds men so firmly together as a mutual and concurring love of Christ; and nothing divides them so effectually as difference in sentiment with regard to Christ.

The saint has every reason to love Christ. He is in all respects beautiful in himself to such as have learnt the first and the great commandment to "love (and fear) the Lord with all the soul, and mind and strength." By any other class his beauty is not appreciated. His beauty is not such as would answer to the world's ideal—moral, artistic, or religious. It is not the beauty of a statue or of a "gentleman born." *Christ is more than kind; he is holy. He is more than forgiving; he is just, and with wickedness angry. He is more than gentle; he is exacting of supreme affection. He is more than*

good ; he is zealous of the Father. He is more than courteous, refined, and cultivated ; *he is the impartial judge according to each man's work, regarding not the persons of men,* and speaking flattery to none. He is more than man ; he is God manifest. The Lamb of God, he is yet the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. The healing Sun of Righteousness, he is yet the treader of the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. A right acquaintance with him will embrace all the features of his beauty, and will lead to the imitation of each of them in our own characters : for he is the example set us to copy. The omission of any causes defect. Some try to imitate his kindness while forgetting his zeal. Others copy his severity while failing to remember his gentleness. Others extol his placability and charity while overlooking his righteousness and jealousy of the Father's honour.

Let us remember all the elements of his perfect character. They are altogether lovely. They constitute the Lord Jesus one by himself in the history of the world. No such personage ever appeared before or since. No name comes near his in its glorious renown. Even now, in the present evil world, God hath given him a name which is above every name. It is the highest name in the world's mouth, in the world's hero roll. True, it is regarded superstitiously. Still, it is the most exalted and honourable in all their assemblies, in all their traditions and associations. Before him, the glory of other names pales like the yellow light of a candle before the sun. He is the object of universal homage, though it be the homage of ignorance and insincerity. He stands alone in the past in his towering dignity, his superhuman earnestness, his unapproachable beneficence, his unwearying patience, his immaculate righteousness, his spotless purity, his unostentatious condescension, his untainted disinterestedness, his perfect submission to the will of God. *He has shed a great light upon the world already.* Europe owes its civilization to him. By the mission he placed in the hands of the apostles, he abolished Paganism and humanized the Gothic hordes.

But above all, he is **THE COMING MAN**. The light of the past is but the token of the dawn, the first rays of the sun sent up from the horizon athwart the darkness of night. The light of the future is the brightness of meridian day. The future is filled with him. No other name is discernible but his. As the stars disappear as the sun rises, so his glory in the future blots out all other names that are named. When the dreary course of the present animal economy shall have run its appointed time, Christ on earth will be all in all. All present greatness (so-called) will have passed away like a dream. Mighty cities : London, Rome, Paris, New York, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, will be no more. The roaring commerce of a thousand markets will have ceased ; the trade of a hundred ship-crowded seas, the business on all the marts and exchanges of the world will have dried up and vanished away. The present political personages who fill so large a place in the importance of the present hour, will be as effete as the mummies of Egypt. Kings and emperors will be remembered as blots : literary men, artists and academicians as deceptions ; the teeming and all-important " public " as the horrid labyrinth of a huge nightmare passed away with the rise of the dawn—never more to re-appear, while **CHRIST** will be the established institution of the earth—established on foundations that cannot be moved. His kingdom will have no end. The earth will be filled with his glory. Nothing will be important but his people and his affairs.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Well may we choose him as our portion and inheritance. The present, which is all we have of our own, is a transitory dream of trouble ; while the future, which is his, and ours in him, is an everlasting reign of glory.

Well may we prefer him and serve him. We have no hope apart from him. Without him human life is without light. There is nothing but clouds around and darkness ahead to the natural man. Decay works within ; vanity attends on all external circumstances ; the grave waits with open mouth at the end of the toilsome journey—and you never know how near that end is. Bring Christ into the economy of human life, and you bring light, hope, joy, friendship with God and man, and an eternal inheritance in reserve. Some say they do not want an eternal inheritance. Some say the present life is quite long enough for them ; that immortality would tire them. Such is the grunt of the sow, which knows no higher good than the mire and the wallow. They speak foolishly. They reason from present weakness and incapacity. Whence comes the sensation of "tire" ? From the incapability of an animal nature to keep up the supply of energy which enjoyment consumes. No doubt a body such as we have would tire of living for ever ; but it is not the present body that is to live for ever. The present body is to be changed : it is to be made a spiritual body ; and the spiritual body is powerful where the animal body is weak. There will be no "tire" or satiety with the spirit body. Weariness belongs to weakness only, and comes in the ratio of weakness purely. A person in poor health tires sooner than one that is robust. One laid on a sick bed is tired as soon as he begins ; one that is well can go on for hours, and enjoy what he is about. A spiritual body is strong, and incapable of fatigue. Therefore, endless days will be endless sweetness and joy ; chiefly because heart and nature will be one with God, the inexhaustible fountain of sweetness, glory and joy.

These things are accessible to us in Christ, and in Christ only. Well may we meet at this table in honour of him and in remembrance of him. It is good for us to be here. It is to our profit to call him to memory. If we remember him, he will remember us in the day of his gladness. If we forget him, he cannot forget himself. He is in heaven, and at the appointed time will come, whether we on earth remember him or not. When that day comes, we shall realize how much it has been to our well-being to have been kept in the way of his commandments, and to have waited on the memorial of his name.

Every time we assemble round the table, he is brought to our minds. We act not as our own friends if we suffer any controllable cause to keep us away. Destructive indeed is the doctrine that we are not called upon to break bread in remembrance of him. *The love of him will lead to it as a delight.* We cannot recall his memory so distinctly as is desirable, without some objective exercise. Jesus, who "knew what was in man," knew this when he appointed this memorial supper. Designed for a purpose, it serves its purpose admirably. It brings him before us in the hour of his humiliation, and introduces to notice the day of his glory. It connects the two in one act. It reminds us of what he accomplished in the days of his weakness as the foundation of the day of his glory. A guileless partaker of our common mortality in Adam, we see him herein offered in harmony with the working of an immutable Creator, that in raising him, the Father might provide us

one in whom His law has been vindicated, that through him His grace might advance without the compromise of His justice. Perceiving this, we can unite in the adoration of the Designer of this arrangement of love. We ascribe glory to Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb. This table of the Lord gives us a standing ground for the scriptural contemplation of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that shall follow. They help us to realize our entire dependence on him for all our hope of goodness in the ages to come ; they help us to feel our position as his servants, his disciples, his brethren : they stir up, from first day to first day, our anxiety to be diligent to make our calling and election sure, by the doing of those things which he has commanded, obedience to which will alone command his favour in that day. To forsake the assembly of ourselves altogether, after the manner of some, is a species of wilful sinning which will cut us off from beneficial relation to that one sacrifice of sins, which was made by and in the Root and Offspring of David. It is a disobedience of one of the leading commandments, left by the Lord for the observance of his disciples, during his absence. The assembly of the saints at the table of the Lord, is one of the sweet resting-places provided by the Lord of the highway, for his weary pilgrims in their journey through this evil world.

At the same time, it is always possible, as at Corinth, to come together, "not for the better but for the worse." We must guard against this by the avoidance of those conditions that lead to such a result. A want of unity is fatal to edification. Union without unity is worse than worthless ; it is pernicious ; it tends to frustrate the objects of fellowship. The ecclesia is not the place at all for discussing the principles of the one faith. That belongs altogether to the outside. The plea of looking at both sides is plausible and looks candid, but it belongs only to those who are uncertain of the faith ; and uncertainty is no feature of the full assurance of faith, without which it is impossible to please God. It is all very well for those who do not know the truth to talk in such a style ; such are in no state to form constituents of a community whose function is to be the "pillar and ground of the truth." Agreement in the things of the Spirit is the first condition of ecclesial unity. The *unity* of the Spirit may be kept in the bond of peace ; but the *schism* of the Spirit—disagreement in the things of the Spirit—renders peace impossible. Those who are indifferent can easily afford to ignore disagreement ; and preach cordially of the virtue of "agreeing to differ." This is no characteristic of the church of the living God. It contends for the faith once delivered to the saints, and obeys Paul's command (1 Tim. 6 : 5) to "turn away" from the perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds. The first characteristic of the true saint is zeal for the things of God. He is not content to cultivate friendship on the basis of "adhesiveness" or any other merely fleshly instinct. He stands "in God" : God's ways and principles are the rule of his life, the measure of his aspirations, the standard of his friendship, the foundation of all his doings. The Laodicean attitude of indifference—the readiness to agree to differ within the precincts of the ecclesia—is impossible with him. He must have the faith first pure, knowing that peace will follow, and from peace edification, and the growth in every good thing that shall prepare the brethren for the coming of the Lord. A contrary condition produces every evil work. Unity in the Spirit will admit of growth to the stature of the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

perfect man in Christ. It will help us to dwell together in love and hope, striving together for the faith of the Gospel, abounding in the whole work of the Lord with thanksgiving.

Let us obey implicitly the advice of Paul, who counsels abstinence from strifes of words, foolish questions and contentions, which he declares to be "unprofitable and vain" (Titus 3 : 9). "Charge them before the Lord," he says, "that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. . . . Shun profane and vain babblings" (2 Tim. 2 : 14-16). He instructed Titus to "AFFIRM CONSTANTLY" that believers should be careful to maintain good works, which were to their profit (Titus 3 : 8). Leaving perverse, uncandid, evasive and Jesuitical disputers, then, to themselves, let us be diligent in every good work, against the impending day of account, relieving the afflicted, comforting the saints in their tribulations, leading sinners into the way of justification and eternal life. These good works wither before the hot blast of contention, strife, backbiting, and vainglory; and by these, men, running well for awhile, are destroyed. Let us take heed, and show ourselves men of God, whose seed "remaineth in them"; who cannot be moved away from the path of duty or the hope of the Gospel by the wildest storms that may come; who stand stoutly, in their particular day and relations, in the position described by Habakkuk: "Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: *yet will I rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation*" (3 : 17). The standing aim of this class is to be approved of God, however much they may incur the opprobrium of men. Men work one way; the children of God another. God's opinion of the ways of men is clearly and abundantly recorded. This record they "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest." They eschew the selfishness rebuked by Haggai, who was commanded by the Spirit to say to the men of Israel, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste? . . . Mine house is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house" (1 : 4-9). There is no stone-and-mortar house of God to attend to; but there is another house—the house of God, the pillar and ground of the truth, whose condition is that of wasteness, and to which we are called to attend in priority to our own affairs. If we are of God, we feel not at liberty to do as the men of Israel did, and as the world around does, to look after their own affairs, and see ourselves comfortably established without regard to the desolate state of the house of God. While God is a pilgrim in the earth, His sons are not content to be dwellers in the tents of sin. While Jerusalem and her children are in affliction, they aim not to seek their ease. They have a heart to feel for the downtrodden house of Christ, and on its upbuilding their best exertions are bestowed. They give not to the Lord the refuse, the rag end, the superfluity. They have noticed the lesson of Mal. 1 : 6-14: "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if, then, I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of Hosts, unto you, O priests, that despise my name. Ye say, Wherein have we despised thy name? Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar: and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? and if ye

offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of Hosts . . . Cursed be the deceiver, that hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing. For I am a great King, saith the Lord of Hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen." These principles apply in the truth. Wise men will have them in remembrance, honouring the Lord with their substance; sowing bountifully, that they may reap bountifully; that in the day about to dawn, they may not be of those who will be rejected for a faithless use of the "few things" now entrusted to their care.

The Psalms

The Lord's experience in the days of his flesh.—Its value to us.—The sufferings of Christ in the Psalms of David.—His prayers to be saved.—His waiting.—The waiting of his brethren.—Trials of the probation.—Enmity without a cause, yet there is a cause.—The world's hatred.—Christ's weakness.—The burden of his flesh nature.—Innocent calamities.—Good men in trouble.—Estrangement of friends for the truth's sake.—Christ's earnestness.—Our example.—The sorrow of godly men.—A joyful ending.—David's imprecations in their applicability to Christ.—The coming exaltation and praise.

As we are aware, brethren and sisters, the object of our assembly this morning is, that Christ should be brought to our remembrance. That remembrance, to be truly effectual, ought to comprehend all the aspects that scripturally appertain to it. Yet there is one aspect in particular that comes prominently into view in this breaking of bread—one that is brought before our notice in a Psalm quoted in one of the portions of Scripture read this morning: the personal experiences of the Lord in the days of his flesh. We have not much insight into this in what is called the Gospel narratives; these deal more particularly with the external relations of the Lord. We see him traversing the districts of Galilee and Judæa, followed by crowds of people, speaking to them the Word of God, and working marvels which attracted their attention. Very occasionally we get a glimpse of the inner workings of his mind. We have the declaration that he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. We see him frequently retire to mountain solitudes to pray. This is no doubt sufficient to tell us that in the days of his flesh the Lord, like ourselves, felt the cloud and the heaviness and the bitterness appertaining to this body of sin, and the circumstances to which it stands related in this present evil world. We naturally desire, however, more explicit revelations of the mental experience of Jesus—a closer view of the actual personal thoughts and feelings of that marvellous personage who was begotten of the Holy Spirit, born at Bethlehem, brought up in subjection to his parents at Nazareth, trained to manual occupation at a carpenter's bench, anointed with the visible descending of dovelike

Spirit and manifested to Israel as the great power of God in their midst. If we had to think that he passed untouched through this vale of tears—that he felt none of our sadness, none of our weariness in waiting for the salvation of God—none of our yearnings for Divine consolation—by so much the less would his case be a comfort to us. We have to be thankful for a portion of the Word which gives us a living picture the very reverse of all this. I refer to the Psalms to which Jesus made allusion as “concerning” him. Here the sufferings of Christ are vividly manifest, as well as the glory that should follow. Those sufferings are not to be confined to the closing scene of his tribulation: the dreadful moment when he was in the hands of a scornful and brutal soldiery, and a spectacle on the cross to the jeering rabble. This was but the climax of his sorrows. We must consider how he felt and what he thought in relation to his whole surroundings. The opportunity of doing this is abundantly afforded in the Psalms, and more particularly in the Psalm to which Paul refers when he says (Rom. 15 : 2), “Christ pleased not himself, but as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.” This is written in the 69th Psalm.

Turning to that Psalm, we are presented with the inner and personal experience of Christ in a form not accessible in the Gospel narratives, and are able to perceive many points of resemblance to our common experience, with an effect which is encouraging. The primary reference is, of course, to David: but the Spirit in David, which was the Root of David, which called him from shepherding and made him king of Israel for a remote purpose of its own, frames David’s utterances in a way that expresses the heart-breakings of David’s Son and Lord while he was the despised and rejected of men. The Psalm begins: “Save me, O my God.” Jesus had to be saved. Here he prays that he may be so; and as Paul says (Heb. 5 : 7), he was heard in that he feared, when with strong crying and tears he made supplication to Him who was able to save him from death. The “crying and tears” spoken of by Paul are mentioned in this Psalm. “The waters are come in unto my soul.” This shows the keenness with which his afflictions were felt: they went home—they pierced his soul—they overwhelmed him with sorrow. “I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God.” Jesus “waited.” He had his season of what we are now going through, and his “waiting” is here shown to have been of that dreary, troublous, trying character that we find it to be. If we picture him in the aspect of a continual ecstasy or even a continual calm we make a mistake. He was a “man of sorrows,” and part of his sorrow was this “waiting for God.” We are tasting the affliction of this attitude. Our whole life is an act of waiting for God, waiting for the time promised, looking for, desiring, and living for the appointed day of the baring of His holy arm. While we wait, the world is busy with its own prosperous devices, jeering at our hopes and quietly pitying our infatuation. False brethren also discourage and weaken our hands, heartless and formal in their profession of faith, and tired of the dreariness of the waiting attitude. The situation is trying, but not more so than was that of the Lord in the day when he could say, “Mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me,

being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty." Christ's enemies were his enemies without a cause in one sense, and with a cause in another. The actual cause Jesus explains in the words addressed to his own brothers after the flesh, as recorded in John 7 : 7 : "The world hateth me, *because I testify of it that the works thereof are evil.*" This was the actual cause of the enmity shown to Christ, yet not a justifiable cause, for in testifying against the world he bore witness to the truth, and bearing witness to the truth ought not, in reason, to create enemies. Therefore the man hated for such a reason, is hated without a cause. This has been the case with the brethren of Christ in all ages. Their whole life and conversation is a testimony against the world—a condemnation of the world after the type of Noah, who, by his faith and obedience, "condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith" (Heb. 11 : 7). This condemnation acts as an irritant on the world, which is pleased with itself, and which loves only those who speak well of it. Hence the hatred of which Jesus himself was an object. This hatred we must accept as part of the appointed tribulation which is to try and purify and make white for the time of the end. We need not aim to escape it. It still remains true, that from God there is "woe" to such as all men speak well of. Constituted as is the present evil world, it is impossible that all men can speak well of a man unless he be of the world himself—a man-pleaser ; and for a man to be of this stamp is to be the subject of future "woe," one in whom God takes no delight. Hatred will be the portion of those who follow in the footsteps of the Lord. We need not seek this hatred. We are to live peaceably with all men as much as lieth in us. But when it does come, we are not to imagine some strange thing has happened. It is what happened to the Master of the household ; and it is sufficient for the disciple that he be as his Master.

"Then I restored that I took not away." This is an illustration of Christ's own precept : "If a man sue thee at the law and take away thy cloak, let him have thy coat also." Doubtless, if we could know the history of Christ's private life at Nazareth, we would find many instances answering to these words of the Psalm. When accused by neighbours of having taken from others things that actually belonged to himself, he would give place unto wrath, and restore that he took not away, comporting himself with a meekness for which a man in our day would be considered a fool. A wider application is found in the fact that he restored friendship and life while we were enemies in our minds, alienated by wicked works ; but the lesson of meekness is the same.

"O Lord, thou knowest my foolishness, and my sins are not hid from thee." The application of this to Christ is only intelligible on the principle that he partook of the common nature of our uncleanness—flesh of Adamic stock, in which, as Paul says, there dwelleth no good thing ; a nature the burdensomeness of which arises from its native tendencies to foolishness and sin. This burden is felt in proportion as higher things are appreciated. Christ knew, as no man can know, the gloriousness and spotlessness and spontaneous holiness of the Spirit nature. The indwelling of the Father by the Spirit would make him sensible of this. Hence he could feel the more keenly the earthward tendencies of the earthy nature—the tendencies to foolishness and sin, which are the characteristics of sinful flesh, not that the tendency was stronger in him than in others, but that his spiritual affinities

SEASONS OF COMFORT

and perceptions were higher, and that, therefore, he would be more conscious of the burden which all the saints of God feel, more or less, causing them to exclaim, "O wretched man that I am!" True, Christ sustained the burden; he carried the load without stumbling. He kept the body under; he held it in subjection to the will of the Father in all things, and thus, by obedience, obtained the approbation of the Father, who was in him. Still, the burden was there; and his consciousness of it finds expression in the words under consideration. Paul's consolation must be ours when we are grieved by a similar cleaving of the soul to the dust: "It is no more I, but sin that dwelleth in me." The new man delights in the law of God after the inward man; the floundering of a sluggish inefficient nature belong to the list of innocent calamities from which we shall be delivered in the day when beauty shall be exchanged for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

"Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel." This is specially applicable to David and Jesus. Calamities befel them; and they were concerned lest those who were faithful in Israel should be disturbed in their trust in God on account of these calamities. When a man believed to be the loved of God is apparently forsaken, the weak of the flock are liable to stagger. In the case of David, his banishment from the presence of Saul, and his life as an outcast on the mountains; in the case of Jesus, his delivery into the hands of evil men, gave reasonable ground of anxiety to those who were looking to them with confidence, and might be shaken in God on account of their adversities. That this result might be averted—that God, while smiting the shepherd, might turn His hand upon the little ones, is the object of this petition. The lesson of it is, that we ought never to allow confidence in God to be moved by the most untoward occurrence—even the apparent desertion of a righteous man, but hold fast to the persuasion which the end will justify at last—that God is just, and will bring His purposes to pass, sometimes even by the very things which appear to frustrate them.

"Because for thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face. I am become a stranger to my brethren, and an alien to my mother's children. For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee have fallen upon me." The application of this to Jesus is obvious: its application to his brethren will become manifest to everyone who acts a faithful part. The effect of the truth, when accepted and appreciated in its breadth and fulness (as involving that complete change of principle, affection, and aim which is signified by the creation of the new man within), is to separate a man from his kindred and friends in the flesh. There is an end to the union which formerly united him to them. Two cannot walk together except they be agreed; and when disagreement turns upon so large and vital a question as duty towards God and the future objects to be aimed at in the present life, alienation is inevitable, if the truth is held with any earnestness. When it is not held with earnestness, its effects are not worth considering one way or other, for they will be of no value to the professor. The essentiality of earnestness—enthusiastic earnestness—is manifest from the case of Christ,

to whom the words in question particularly apply : "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up." This expresses no mild degree of earnestness. To be eaten up is to be absorbed, engrossed, taken up very much. This was Christ's mental relation to the things of the Father, and it is the standard at which we must aim, reaching which the other result will come. The reproaches of them that reproached God will fall on us. God is reproached in His servants ; they are the objects of the derision which men feel for divine things in general : and it will be directed more particularly against those who are most identified with these things. The lukewarm and half-hearted keep their respectability and suffer none of the reproach. Reproach is a bitter thing to bear, but when suffered for the name of Christ, it has promise of great sweetness for the day that is even now at the door.

"When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, THAT was to my reproach." The ungodly are above sorrow themselves, except the sorrow that comes from the deprivation of some present creature advantage. They know nothing of the sorrow that springs from the ascendancy of evil in the general situation of mankind. This is the highest sorrow. David and Jesus experienced it intensely. Their brethren in all ages have felt it, and it is to their reproach. The world like to see men cheery. They are discomfited at refusal to take part in their hilarious mirth, which is the crackling of thorns under a pot. They make the sad sobriety of the truth a matter of scoff : "What dismal creatures you are ! Why can you not be like other people ?" This is a reproach not to be ashamed of. Saints do not mope on principle, or mope at all in the true sense of that term. They share the Master's sadness at the triumph of respectable ungodliness—the disregard of all divine things. Their hearts are weighed down by the mighty prevalence of wrong among men—the evils that are more extensive, penetrating, and common than the common intellect realizes. But their sorrow hath hope. It springs from a capacity to appreciate joyful things. It has its root in the knowledge of God, the love of His ways, the desire to see good among men on the foundation of His glory. To such Jesus says, "Blessed are ye that mourn, for ye shall be comforted. Blessed are ye that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for ye shall be filled."

"I made sackcloth my garment ; I became a proverb unto them. They that sit in the gate (the men having authority) speak against me ; I am the song of drunkards." Fulfilled in Jesus, this will in a measure apply to all who follow in his steps. From verse 13 to 21 sets forth the earnest petitions of Jesus to the Father in the days of his flesh, and the severity with which he felt the troubles that befel him. From verse 22 to verse 28, we have a style of language which the majority of people have a difficulty in recognizing as the utterances of the Messiah—imprecation against his enemies. "Let their table become a snare : that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not ; and make their loins continually to shake. Pour out thine indignation upon them." The difficulty arises from confining the view to the day of his humiliation. The Christ-Spirit in David was not confined, but covered the whole breadth of the divine purpose. Now, though Christ in the days of his flesh suffered as a lamb led to the slaughter, yet the purpose of God was at last to pour wrath on his persecutors : and this

SEASONS OF COMFORT

purpose is foreshadowed in many of Christ's discourses. Christ was not only a sufferer, but the appointed avenger. There is a time to bless and forgive, and there is a time to execute judgment, even when he returns to the winepress of Jehovah's anger. This prayer of malediction has reference to that time. It is a prophetic intimation by the same Spirit in David that the expectation of the poor shall not always perish : that vile men shall not always be exalted : that meekness and righteousness shall not always be under the heel of the proud. For a season, for discipline, we are commanded to be under subjection to evil, as Jesus was ; but it is with the distinct prospect that we shall be avenged by Him who hath said, "Vengeance is mine : I will repay," and this prayer of Christ's shows it is lawful to make that purpose a subject of petition.

"I am poor and sorrowful," continues the Spirit in David concerning Christ : "let thy salvation, O God, set me up on high." In this prayer, every saint can join. Nothing can set them up but the salvation of God. The best condition of mortal life—the highest honour men can bestow—has no power to satisfy the longing which the enlightened soul has continually to God and His glorious perfection. The salvation of God, which will constitute them actual partakers of the Divine nature, will indeed set them up and fill their mouths with songs : in view of which, and the present mercies that lead to it, they can as heartily join in the cheerful strain with which the Psalm concludes : "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than ox or bullock that hath horns or hoofs"—intimating the contemplated end of the Mosaic ritual in Christ.

"The humble also shall see this and be glad : your heart shall live that see God, for the Lord heareth the poor, and despiseth not his prisoners." The full force of this will not be manifest till the day when Christ is surrounded with the assembly of his glorified poor, whose gladness will find vent in singing. They will rejoice effectually in the salvation which shall be theirs in the day of the Lord's vengeance. The humble shall then see the glory of Jesus, and be glad when the scorner is made to lick the dust. The hearts that now seek God in humiliation and sorrow will then live and rejoice at the visible exemplification of the fact that the Lord heareth the poor and despiseth not His prisoners. Then shall heaven and earth praise Him, the seas, and everything that moveth therein. Saints can even now call upon all things thus to praise in anticipation of the fact declared in the concluding verses : "For God will save Zion, and will build the cities of Judah : that they may dwell there and have it in possession. The seed also of his servants shall inherit it : and they that love his name shall dwell therein."

The Proverbs

Speaking as the oracles of God.—The famine-stricken style of common talk.—Divinity of the Proverbs of Solomon.—The correctives they contain of extremes.—Taking no thought for the morrow.—Diligence and idleness.—Prudence and foresight in the New Testament.—The place for faith.—Putting every duty in its right place.—Diligence commended, but accumulation of wealth forbidden.—Patience and meekness not to be carried too far.—The apostles and Solomon agreed.—Kindness and dangerous friendships.—Knowledge.—Two extremes.—No conflict between Solomon and other divine teachers.—Understanding accessible only to the humble.—True wisdom, and the counterfeit wisdom article.—God's point of view, a feature peculiar to the Bible alone.—Wisdom without God not wisdom.—God's power in the destiny of man.—Solomon's Proverbs not of merely secular application.—Solomon's words at the table.—Unity of the divine circle.

PETER says, "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." There is great need for, and advantage in, obeying this injunction. We live in a day when men speak in a style very different from the oracles of God. Apart from the doctrines that are in universal favour, the style of speech is emasculated and thin. The ideas are few, and these in their expression are spread over an extended surface; starvation is the result to those who feed on them. There is a famine, not of bread, but of the Word of the Lord. A conceited philosophy on the one hand, and an utterly impoverished theology on the other, have given the world a colourless language, destitute of all truly nutritive elements. The Spirit of God calls with great reason upon the sons of men to turn from their famine-stricken diet, to the fatness provided in the oracles of God, in which they may delight their souls; but the call is disregarded, the world is enamoured of its own ways and its own thoughts. In the language of Apocalyptic figure, it is drunk, and drunken men have no relish for wholesome food. This dementedness shown in the universal taste for the starvation garbage of the natural man's philosophy will continue to prevail until the day of fat things, the day of the blessing of Abraham to all nations, shall be inaugurated by the man whom God hath appointed. A few, however, amid the teeming millions will be found in wisdom's way when that day arrives. It is our privilege to have been invited to walk in this way. Let us hold fast well by this first lesson of wisdom; "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God."

We are helped to do this by our practice of reading the Scriptures, not only in our daily private life, but in all our assemblies, as the foundation of our thoughts. This morning we are with Solomon. Some have doubted whether we ought to regard his sayings as the oracles of God; but such a doubt can only exist where there is a neglect to take into account the apostolic recognition of these sayings as the voice of God. The judgment of the apostles is an unerring guide to us on such a point; for Christ said the Spirit would be with them to guide them into all truth (John 16 : 13). And Paul lays it down that any man truly enlightened will acknowledge apostolic

sayings to be the commandments of the Lord (1 Cor. 14 : 37). In view of this, the divine character of the Proverbs is settled by Paul's quotation of them in this character. He expressly refers to Proverbs 3 : 11, as "The exhortation *which speaketh unto you as unto children*" (Heb. 12 : 5). It is unnecessary by the side of this to refer for confirmation to the fact that Proverbs constituted a part of "the Scriptures" to which Jesus always referred as the standard of divine authority, nor to the fact that God gave Solomon "wisdom and understanding exceeding much . . . and his wisdom excelled all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt: for he was wiser than all men" (1 Kings 4 : 29). What if the Proverbs consist largely of sayings previously current in Israel, and collected by Solomon? Whence came these current wise sayings? Were they not due to the presence in Israel from generation to generation of men of divine illumination, such as Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, and many others? And whatever their origin, was not Solomon's adoption of them the explicit sanction of God? Any other view is inconsistent with all the facts of the case, and would rob us of one of the most precious storehouses of wisdom accessible to man.

When we make the acquaintance of the Proverbs, we not only obtain a large confirmation of the wisdom elsewhere indicated in the holy oracles, but we find a supply of correctives of especial value in view of the extremes in which it is possible to run in the unaided endeavour to carry out some of the divine precepts. "Take no thought for the morrow," says Jesus; "consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin." Paul also says, "I would have you without carefulness." These exhortations, rightly applied, do not exclude providence and reasonable preparation, because they are directed against distraction, the word translated care, and meaning anxiety of a worrying kind. But they are capable of misapplication, and have been misapplied by some who have held them to justify absolute shiftlessness and inattention to secular contingencies. The Proverbs supply the antidote to this mistake, even if it were not to be found in the New Testament. They enjoin the exercise of a diligent foresight of our affairs. "Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds" (27 : 23). "The hand of the diligent maketh rich" (10 : 4). "The hand of the diligent shall bear rule" (12 : 24). "The soul of the diligent shall be made fat" (13 : 4). "Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings" (22 : 29).

On the other side of the question, idleness is held up to reprobation. "The idle soul shall suffer hunger" (19 : 15). "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing" (13 : 4). "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest" (6 : 6-8). "The slothful shall be under tribute" (12 : 24).

The caviller might contend that this was a case in which one part of the Scriptures taught a different doctrine from another; that Solomon was contradicted by Christ. But it is not so. The principle of prudent foresight and diligent provision is plainly recognized in the New Testament, though not so prominently taught as in the Proverbs. There was more need for the inculcation of faith than industry, because the one comes less naturally than the other; and, therefore, faith is more conspicuously taught, but not

at the expense of industry. Industry is also enjoined. Paul says, "If any man work not, neither shall he eat" (2 Thess. 3 : 10). "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5 : 8). "Provide for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of all men" (2 Cor. 8 : 21). "Let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4 : 28). Jesus illustrates these injunctions in the command to "gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost" (John 6 : 12); and also in the words addressed to his apostles when the time had come for a suspension of the miraculous supervision under which they had laboured: "When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one" (Luke 22 : 35, 36).

There is a place for faith, where our anxiety can avail nothing. We are to trust that God will bring to pass the provision of all we need, if we confide the matter to Him. At the same time, we are not to relax those efforts upon which He has made the provision to depend in the second place. Any man who neglects these is a breaker of the word, however much faith he may think he has. The thing to be careful about is to see that our prudence does not degenerate to faithlessness, and interfere with the performance of duty, whether to God or man. God hath united things in certain relations, and what God hath joined, let no man put asunder. Wisdom is the putting of everything into its right place. Faith does its best without anxiety, and trusts for the rest; the feeling that would leave all to God is presumption. One thing is the appointment of God as well as another, and we must give all their place. In this, the Book of Proverbs is a great help.

While diligence is commended in the Proverbs, diligence to achieve individual wealth is discountenanced, and even condemned. Thus we read "Labour not to be rich . . . wilt thou set thine eyes on that which is not? For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven" (23 : 4, 5). Again, "A faithful man shall abound with blessings (that is, to others): but he that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent" (28 : 20). Here the Spirit by Solomon prevents the prudential maxims from being carried to an extreme. The man who aims to be rich aims wrongly. He not only aims at a result that will "pierce himself through with many sorrows" even if he succeed, but he encumbers himself with a motive which will paralyse his arm in all directions of beauty and goodness, and which will, at last, sink him in perdition. "Neither poverty nor riches" is the condition commended in the Proverbs (30 : 8). This is in strict harmony with the spirit of the New Testament. Jesus said to His disciples, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of," and taught them to pray for their daily bread; but on the subject of pursuing riches, he used the parable of the man with the barns, described as a fool, "which had much goods laid up for many years," and whose life was suddenly required of him. Christ's comment on the case is, "So is he that layeth up treasure *for himself*, and is not rich *toward God*."

SEASONS OF COMFORT

There are other matters in which the Proverbs afford checks against extremes. Paul recommends patience with adversaries, exhorting that in meekness we should instruct those who oppose themselves. Jesus commands kindness to all, even the undeserving; and counsels submission to evil, and compliance with request even to the double of what is asked. There is a place for the operation of all these precepts; but they are misapplied when they are allowed to interfere with the attitude of wisdom presented in these sayings of Solomon: "Go from the presence of a foolish man when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge" (14:7). "Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words" (23:9). "Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease" (22:10). Christ and the apostles are themselves on the side of these counsels. While exhorting us to patience, forbearance, love, kindness, etc., Christ says, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine" (Matt. 7:6). "Beware of false prophets . . . ye shall know them by their fruits" (Matt. 7:15). "Let him (a man refusing to reason) be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican" (Matt. 18:17). So also Paul: "Beware of dogs; beware of evil workers" (Phil. 3:2). "Withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly" (2 Thess. 3:6). "False brethren . . . to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour" (Gal. 2:5). "Of some have compassion, making a difference: others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh" (Jude 23). On the same principle, we are commanded to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints, and to have no fellowship with any who subvert the doctrine of the apostles in faith or practice. The two sets of precepts are not inconsistent, though made so in the practice of some. Our kindness may abound with a plenteousness that goes beyond the requests of those who ask us, and we may exercise a patience as nearly unwearying as may be, and a magnanimity that shall be godlike toward the evil and erring, without taking fools into our bosom, or suffering the highest interests of ourselves and others to be endangered by a weak friendship for those whose ways decline to death.

So also on the subject of knowledge. There is a relation of things in which "knowledge puffeth up," and in which "if any man thinketh he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know" (1 Cor. 8:2). At the same time it is true, and Solomon helps us to the recognition of it, "that the soul be without knowledge is not good" (Prov. 19:2). "A man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels" (1:5). "When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul, discretion shall preserve thee, and understanding shall keep thee" (2:10, 11).

The same thing is testified by the prophets and the apostles. In Hosea we read (4:6), "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge"; in Isaiah, "By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many" (53:11). Paul says "ignorance" alienates the Gentiles from the life of God (Eph. 4:18), but that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is a saving power (2 Cor. 4:3-5). The day of Christ is a day in which "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the

Lord " (Isa. 11 : 9). " Wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of his times " (Isa. 33 : 6).

On many other subjects there is the same clear guidance in the Proverbs on points on which men are liable to run and have run, into extremes. There is no conflict between what Solomon says and what the Spirit of wisdom inculcates through other instruments ; only some phases and matters are more distinctly put in the Proverbs, and by this, wise men are held at their equilibrium. There are those who are not wise, because they obey not the command by Solomon which says, " Incline thine ear to wisdom ; apply thine heart to understanding ; seek her as silver ; search for her as for hid treasure. " Some never are able rightly to divide the word of truth, but are always stumbling on appearances of discrepancy and conflict, and incline to the side of such as scorn the word. Sympathizing with the scorner, they experience the fate of scorners. Solomon says, " The scorner seeketh wisdom, and findeth it not : but knowledge is easy unto him that understandeth " (14 : 6). The inability of this class to find wisdom is not altogether due to incapacity. God stands in their way as the angel did in Balaam's. " Surely he scorneth the scorners : but he giveth grace unto the lowly " (3 : 34). God is only to be found of those who seek Him in an earnest and diligent manner. This is testified many times in the word. " Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you " (Jas. 4 : 8). " Ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart " (Jer. 29 : 13). " If thou seek him, he will be found of thee ; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off " (1 Chron. 28 : 9). These features find their expression in the words of Christ : " Except a man receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein. " A simple, docile, childlike, disinterested, unbiased, and perfectly candid and earnest desire and search for truth is essential to the acquisition of divine wisdom. To any other state of mind, the fountain is sealed. It is easy for God to draw the veil without a man's knowing it. In this way, He has blinded Israel, and thus He blinds many a man who scornfully seeketh wisdom, but findeth it not.

The Proverbs resemble every other part of the oracles of God as regards the nature and origin of the wisdom set forth. They are not like the systems of the ancients (though, by the way, Solomon is more ancient than any of them). These, who are spoken of as " the wise, " made wisdom a mere matter of observing nature and speculating on the working methods of her operations. They did not know God, and could know nothing of His revelation and His superintendence and purposes as the principal element of wisdom. Hence their wisdom is foolishness for all practical purposes. It is thin, watery, tasteless, powerless stuff. There is nothing in common between the philosophers and Solomon. Solomon has nothing to say for " philosophy "—which, in truth, is a glorified abstraction, having no existence except in the language and brains of those who know nothing of true wisdom. He mounts as high as heaven, and puts his finger, so to speak, on the only source of wisdom. " The Lord giveth wisdom ; out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding " (2 : 6). " The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge " (1 : 7 ; 9 : 10). " The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life " (14 : 27). " Be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long " (23 : 17). " It shall be well with them that fear God "

SEASONS OF COMFORT

(Eccl. 8 : 12). " Fear God, and keep his commandments : for this is the whole duty of man " (Eccl. 12 : 13).

Here is a feature peculiar to the Bible. In the Bible only is God's view of the case made a practical element of behaviour and destiny. " The Lord loveth him that followeth after righteousness " ; " The prayer of the upright is his delight " (Prov. 15 : 9, 8). " The Lord is far from the wicked : but he heareth the prayer of the righteous " (29). " Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord " (16 : 5). And surely God's view of a case is the most important fact concerning it ; for with Him is the power to raise up or cast down, to save or to kill, to confer good or render evil. Since all things are of Him and in His hand, it is no mere religious extravagance (so-called), but the sober truth, to say that His fear is the beginning of all knowledge and wisdom. The philosophy that excludes this is a philosophy of human pride, and a philosophy lacking the very core of truth. Men like to glorify themselves by the investigation and promulgation of what is. But the glory even of this is to Him whom they forget, in whose hand their breath is, and whose are even the little and vain efforts by which they presume to construct a system of wisdom without God in it. And of what avail, as a matter of wisdom, is the knowledge of what is (as presented in science and philosophy), as compared with a knowledge of the pleasure of Him who has power to change what is, and who has declared His purpose so to do as regards both the righteous and the wicked ?

This is the most beautiful feature of the Proverbs, their constant fundamental dependence on the future dispensation of God's power in the destiny of man. Some think the Proverbs of a merely secular application, that is, that their wisdom depends upon considerations limited to the present life. That they are profitable for the life that now is, is true, as it is also true of the Gospel (1 Tim. 4 : 8), but that their chief bearing is towards that coming arrangement of things upon earth which has been the purpose of God from the beginning, will not be denied by those who have pondered the following sayings : " The wicked is driven away in his wickedness ; but *the righteous hath hope* IN HIS DEATH " (14 : 32). " When a wicked man dieth, his expectation shall perish, and the hope of unjust men perisheth . . . but to him that soweth righteousness shall be a sure reward " (11 : 7, 18). " The lip of truth shall be *established for ever* : but a lying tongue is *but for a moment* " (12 : 19). " The righteous shall be recompensed *in the earth* : much more the wicked and sinner " (11 : 31). " The house of the wicked shall be overthrown : but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish " (14 : 11). " Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed : but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded " (13 : 13). " As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no more : but the righteous is an everlasting foundation. . . . The righteous shall never be removed : but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth " (10 : 25, 30). " The upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it. But the wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it " (2 : 21, 22).

It is an illustration of the unity that characterizes the oracles of God, that all these things should be appropriate to the table of the Lord around which we are assembled. There is no breach in the divine circle. Solomon is one with Christ, even as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets,

who will sit down together in the kingdom of God. The reason is that it is one God, who spake by them all. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Heb. 1 : 1). This makes all the difference between the wisdom of the Bible and the wisdom of "the wise" of this world. In the one is light and harmony ; in the other, darkness on the highest problems. Let us walk in the light and rejoice in the light that we may be children of light, both now and in the glorious age to come.

The Temptation of Christ

Profitably remembering the death of Christ.—His moral preparation for sacrifice—Jesus the seed of David.—His temptation in the wilderness.—The time of its occurrence.—The nature of the tempter.—Christ's use of the Scriptures to answer the tempter.—Reverence for the Scriptures a mark of the sons of God.—Three particulars in the temptation.—Comprising the principle of all temptations.—The three points separately considered and their lessons.—A remarkable episode in a remarkable history.

It is doubtless the primary object of this weekly breaking of bread to keep before our minds the Lord's death, as saith Paul, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." But this is not to be done profitably or scripturally by confining our contemplations to the fact of his death in an historic sense. What we have to do is to remember not only the fact but the meaning of the fact, and what God has accomplished by it for us. To do this, we must take into account many things not seen on Calvary, and not spoken of on that dreadful night when all the disciples forsook him and fled. We must have in view what went before.

Under this head, we might go back as far as the Garden of Eden, and look at the fact that by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin. I do not, however, propose this morning to go so far back as that, but to look at Christ in what may be called his moral preparation for that acceptable offering of himself to God without spot, which he accomplished through the Eternal Spirit, as Paul informs us in Heb. 9 : 14. That offering was the sacrifice of a proved and obedient man, tempted in all points like his brethren, yet without sin, that is, without disobedience—for as regards sin concentered, so to speak, in those physical effects produced by sin in the first instance, which Paul metonymically styles "sin that dwelleth in me," Jesus was no exception to his brethren. He was "the seed of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1 : 3) ; he took part of the same flesh and blood as the children (Heb. 2 : 14) ; he was made in all things like to his brethren (Heb. 2 : 17) ; he was made in the likeness (that is, the sameness) of sinful flesh (Rom. 8 : 3) ; and was therefore made sin for us—he, who, in the moral

SEASONS OF COMFORT

sense, knew no sin (2 Cor. 5 : 21). Such is the testimony which is in harmony with the object of his sacrificial manifestation ; to destroy, through death, the *diabolos* having the power of death (Heb. 2 : 14) ; to condemn sin in the flesh (Rom. 8 : 3). Such, also, is the conclusion involved in the elementary proposition that Jesus Christ came in the flesh.

It is not, however, the bodily element of the one great offering on which I wish this morning to fix your attention ; but the moral qualification involved in the fact attested by Paul and others, that he was tempted. The testimony is that he was "*in all points* tempted, like as we are" (Heb. 4 : 15). We look at one particular form of this temptation—that which, by pre-eminence, is known as "the temptation of Christ." Here we shall find instruction and help in various directions, while we "consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself."

We have to note the time the temptation occurred. It was just after the baptism of Jesus when the Spirit of God visibly descended upon him, and abode upon him, in the presence of assembled multitudes of Israel, and when he had been openly and audibly acknowledged of the Father as His well-beloved Son, whom they were commanded to hear. Why was he at such a time "driven of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" ? We may note here an illustration of the principle proclaimed by the Lord himself that to whom much is given, of them is much required. Jesus endowed with an increased measure, yea, a measureless portion of the power and favour of the Father, had to be put to a proof equal to the new greatness conferred upon him. For thirty years before, during a private life at Nazareth, he had been subject to the common temptations of men ; *now*, anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, it was meet that he should be subjected to a corresponding test of faithfulness before going forth in the plenitude of this power to bear the Father's name before Israel. From this we may deduce the lesson practically applicable to ourselves, that our trials and our temptations will be commensurate with our opportunities, powers, and privileges. The privileges of the apostles were greater than ours : so were their troubles. The privileges of some at this present time are greater than others living at the same time ; so are their temptations and afflictions, and so also will be the measure of their stewardship.

The nature of the tempter in the case of Christ has always been a much-disputed question. It is really of no practical importance where the orthodox devil is discarded. It is the principles involved in the temptation that call for attention as applicable to ourselves. Whether the tempter was external or internal, or both ; or whether the temptation was done in reality or trance, the guidance of Christ's example to his brethren is the same. Their temptations take all shapes without altering the principle that achieves the victory. Therefore, it is practically immaterial what sort of a devil it was that put Christ to the proof, provided it be recognized that the supernatural immortal fiend of popular theology is out of the question. It is more than probable that Christ's temptation, like that of Adam and all his brethren, included an external tempter and those internal feelings to which he could appeal. It certainly was not his flesh nature merely, because it is testified that when the temptation was ended, "the devil left him for a season," which his flesh nature did not do. Who the personal tempter was cannot be decided, because there is no testimony.

It is a matter of little consequence. It is depressing to see a point like this zealously debated where the real teaching of the whole case is unappreciated or unacted on.

The first fact that strikes us is that Jesus employed the Scriptures to repel the suggestions of the tempter. He gave a Bible reason, in each case, for not doing what he was asked to do. This is suggestive in many ways. It exhibits Jesus in the aspect of being acquainted with the Scriptures, and of having that memory of their practical instructions that was equal to his requirements in the hour of need. It may be said that this acquaintance was due to the presence of the Spirit with him. There is no proof of this. The Spirit did not admit him to a knowledge of the day and the hour (Mark 13 : 32), nor of the times or the seasons which the Father had reserved (Acts 1 : 7). The bestowments of the Spirit in all cases were in the measure of the Father's intention, and that only. Hence the gifts differed amongst the spiritually-endowed brethren of the first century, although it was "the same spirit" in each case (1 Cor. 12 : 8-11). And hence also the apostles, who healed the sick as a public seal of the divinity of the Gospel, could not use the power for private purposes (2 Tim. 4 : 20). Jesus "learned obedience" (Heb. 5 : 8), and "increased in wisdom" (Luke 2 : 52), which implies development, in harmony with, and by the use of, the means God has appointed for those ends. If, therefore, Jesus knew the Scriptures, it was because "his custom was" to frequent the synagogue, and to read the Scriptures (Luke 4 : 16). Let no one imagine that this is inconsistent with his being God manifest in the flesh. All parts of truth are consistent. His being God manifest in the flesh led to his powerful proneness in a scriptural direction, and to the fruitfulness of his application in this direction ; but it did not make him independent of the testimony which the Spirit in the Psalms says was his study all the day, and the understanding of which made him wiser than his teachers (Psa. 119 : 97-104).

In Christ, therefore, "in the days of his flesh," we have an example of that endeavour to become familiar with the Scriptures in daily reading, which is the characteristic of the modern revival of the truth. Let us hold on to this. Let us not be like the Sadducees, of whom Jesus declared they "knew not the Scriptures" ; but like him who commanded them to "search the Scriptures" ; who reproved his disciples for their slowness of heart in the matter ; and whose last attitude towards them was that of expounding to them, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself. Only in this way can we reach the condition of mind exemplified in the case of his temptation. The Scriptures known and pondered will come to our help in the time of need. We shall be able to refuse compliance with this and that, because "it is written," but if we neglect the Scriptures, we shall forget duty in many matters, and fall an easy prey to the temptations that come upon us at all points. We shall be in the opposite case to that described in the Psalms : "Thy word have I hid in my heart (that is, put deeply into my heart), that I might not sin against thee."

All this implies that if a thing is written in the Scriptures it is a sufficient reason for our observing it. The recognition of this is the distinguishing mark of the sons of God nowadays as in the days of old. It is that which separates our profession of faith from all the religious systems of the age. We discard all tradition of merely human origin ; we

SEASONS OF COMFORT

repudiate the notion of light within ; we disown the so-called " Holy-Ghost " outpouring of the sectarian theology as the mere excitation of animal magnetism, under the stimulus of false thoughts—terrifying or soothing, as the case may be. We also deny that a man's natural understanding can furnish any guidance as to the will of God, the nature of righteousness, or the way of salvation. We regard the Scriptures, and, in our age, the Scriptures alone, as the source of information and authority in all matters pertaining to God. On this foundation we stand with Christ, and in this confidence we know we have many good reasons to rejoice. It is a position that cannot, in true reason, be assailed either in the name of history, philosophy, or science. We are on a rock that cannot be shaken. Let us hold on to our advantage, and not be like those who, having once attained it, let it slip out of their hands by neglecting to read the word, and thus lapsing into their original ignorance and unspirituality.

The temptation is recorded in three particulars only, and these are very briefly put ; but it will be found that they comprise, in principle, all the temptations to which we can be exposed. First, there was the proposal that Jesus should illegitimately minister to his own need in the matter of food. The temptation on this point was made as keen as it was possible to be. It was not brought to bear when Christ had no need. It would have been no temptation had the proposal not coincided with a strong desire in the direction proposed. It came to him after a fast of forty days ; when the Spirit, having sustained him all that time with a supply of vital energy ordinarily derived from the alimentive process, permitted him to hunger. As the proverb has it, " Hunger will break through stone walls." Even lawlessness committed from the force of hunger is leniently viewed by men in general, as it is written, " Men do not despise a thief if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry." The hunger of Christ, therefore, made the temptation a very strong one. But the temptation was made still stronger by the way the tempter put it : " *If thou be the son of God, command that these stones be made bread.*" This was as much as to say that the proof of his Messiahship required him to do what was proposed, and that if he failed to do it, he would give his tempter ground for doubting the proclamation that had just been made on the banks of the Jordan. Thus Christ's desire to testify the truth was cunningly brought to the help of his hunger to incline him to provide himself with food. But the power to make bread at will, which Christ possessed, as afterwards shown by his feeding a multitude with five loaves and two fishes, was not given to him to provide his own natural wants, but to exhibit his Father's name to Israel. Consequently, though he had the power which the tempter challenged, he was not at liberty to put it forth at the time and for the purpose proposed. It would have been sin in him to comply with the suggestion. He repelled the suggestion by a quotation from the Scriptures which involved the assertion of those facts : " It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

The power of this rejoinder may not at first sight be manifest ; because, so far as appearance went, the proposal was not to discard the Word of God, but merely to provide the bread which the answer recognized as an element, though not alone, in the process of living. If we understand, however, that the proposed mode of providing it was wrong, the strength of it appears.

“Bread alone” will finally land a man in the grave, because bread alone cannot bestow immortality. Bread, with the Word of God believed and obeyed, will be a stepping-stone to life that will never end (and it is in this sense that the Scriptures speak of men “living”). In fact, in this connection, bread becomes part of the pathway to eternal life, for without the bread first to develop and sustain the natural man, the Word of God could not have that ground to work on which leads to everlasting life (first, that which is natural; afterwards, that which is spiritual). But bread with the Word of God disobeyed, is “bread alone,” so far as life-giving power is concerned: for the Word of God confers no everlasting life on the disobedient. Consequently for a man to obtain bread on terms that involve his non-submission to the Word of God (and this was the tempter’s proposal), is to take his stand on “bread alone.” To such a case, the Scripture quoted by Jesus has obviously a most forcible application. The rejoinder was unanswerable.

Now, “these things were written for our instruction.” It was intended that we should be able to wield this Scripture as a sword in the conflict with our tempters and our temptations. Are there no cases in which it is necessary? We have not received supernatural power to make bread; but we have all, more or less, received the natural power to do so in the sense of earning it, and the use of natural power is governed by the same law as the use of supernatural. We may not wrongly use our powers or opportunities in the gaining of daily bread. It is customary in times of stress in this matter, to say, “We must live.” This is often made a reason for conforming to tricks of trade and other forms of unrighteousness. A man remains in the ministry, say (for there have been such cases), or preaches, or appears to preach, false doctrine, and maintains or appears to maintain an unscriptural system, because he or his family “must live.” It is a sufficient answer to say, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” If he chooses, for the sake of bread, to ignore obligations and duties presented by the word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God, he chooses bread alone, and that, too, a bread that perishes, with which he too will perish. There are many cases and situations to which this will apply. Men of discernment and the fear of God will be able to make the application.

“Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.” Here we have a different class of temptation. In the first, he was invited for two powerful reasons to make a forbidden use of power entrusted to his hands. In this the tempter goes to the other extreme, and invites Jesus to throw himself ostentatiously on the promises of God. This, perhaps, was more difficult to meet than the other. It was as if the tempter said, “Thou art the Messiah, art thou not?”—“Yes.” “It is written, is it not, that He shall give His angels charge concerning thee, and they shall bear thee up?”—“It is so written.” “Cast thyself down, then: how canst thou expect me to believe if thou dost not?” How was this to be met? By the assertion of a principle ignored in the tempter’s application of Scripture—a principle which all divine promises pre-

SEASONS OF COMFORT

suppose, and which would have been violated by compliance with the tempter's challenge ; that there must be no familiarity or presumption towards God : that we must make a wise and full use of all that He has put in our power, and that divine help is only for the need that remains after there has been a humble, wise and loving employment of the means already in our hand. This principle Jesus asserted by quoting Scripture : " Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Had he thrown himself down, as the tempter proposed, he would have done what the Scriptures thus forbid, and would have forfeited his claim to the promise to which the tempter so sophistically appealed. The protection promised in that passage was protection from evil beyond control, and not from evil rashly and presumptuously incurred.

The application of this to the brethren of Christ is obvious. They are not to tempt God by running into evil on the strength of promises that are for those only who in wisdom and the fear of God act the part of wise stewards of what God has already committed to them. They must learn rightly to divide the word of truth, and not, like the tempter, exalt one part of the word to the destruction of another. It is written, " Cast thy bread to the hungry " : they are not, therefore, to scatter their entire substance to the beggars of the street ; for it is also written, " He that provideth not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." Ministration to the poor is to be in the measure allowed by the provision of home. It is written, " Seek not what ye shall eat, or what he shall drink : seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you." We are not, therefore, to neglect the means of livelihood ; for it is also written, " If any man will not work, neither shall he eat." " Provide things honest in the sight of all men." We are not to make temporal ends the object of life and the springs of our actions ; we are to give this place to the kingdom of God. Nevertheless, we are to be " diligent in business while thus serving the Lord." It is written, " Take no thought for the morrow." " Have faith in God." " He careth for you." " He knoweth what things ye have need of." " He will feed and clothe you." We are not, therefore, to sit down in idleness, make no arrangement and put forth no effort, expecting the bread to be brought to our doors, for it is also written, " Go to the ant, thou sluggard, consider her ways and be wise." " Labour with your hands, providing the thing that is good." " Commit the keeping of your souls to him in well-doing." We are to find the harmony of these various directions of the word in an un-anxious, trustful, well-doing industry which we trust God to bless and prosper for the ministering of seed to the sower and bread to the eater.

These instances might be multiplied. Modern fanaticism and misconstructions of the word impose upon us frequently the necessity of confronting devil-quoted Scripture with the weapon Christ placed in our hand when he quoted, " Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

" Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them ; and saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." Here the temptation takes a different direction. Having failed to induce Jesus to gratify illegitimately the cravings of the flesh or to transgress in the direction of presumption towards God, the tempter tries the

effect of present honour, wealth and exaltation offered on the simple condition of doing homage to the offerer, as the kings and governors of the Roman earth were in the habit of doing to Cæsar for their position and dignities. Jesus utterly repels the suggestion, reminding the tempter that the Scriptures command one service only. "Get thee hence, Satan : for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and *him only* shalt thou serve."

Jesus afterwards said, "To him that overcometh, will I grant to sit with me in my throne, as *I also overcame*, and am set down with my Father in *his* throne." Hence the victory of Christ in this temptation has a practical value for us. It is a something we can imitate. It may be asked, How can we imitate him in the rejection of an offer we shall never receive? Well, we shall never be offered power and wealth in the form in which it was offered to him; but we have the same temptation on a smaller scale. There is a continual and silent offer to every saint (and sometimes the offer is not a silent one) to possess this world's advantages on condition of falling in with the worship of the world in some form or other. Sometimes the worship proposed is ecclesiastical ("join our body, and it will be to your advantage"); sometimes it is political ("it will pay you to take part in politics"); sometimes it is social ("come out, good fellow, make yourself one of us; you will not regret it"); sometimes it is undisguised, by pleasure-seekers and the immoral. In every case, there is an implied proposal to serve that old serpent, the devil and Satan, which is incorporate in, and deceiveth the whole world, backed up with a guarantee that we shall be rewarded. There is only one safe answer for every brother of the Lord Jesus. Do not parley: repel the advance decisively: "Get thee hence, Satan." We cannot serve God and Mammon. We cannot be the friend of God and the friend of the world at the same time. "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." It is Christ himself who has given us this motto; and he has led the way in the application of it. "The kingdoms of the world and the glory of them" will be the inheritance of Christ and his brethren in due time. While the devil has the disposal of them, it is their part to be strangers and pilgrims, having here no continuing city, but seeking one to come.

The temptation of Christ is a remarkable episode in a remarkable history. It deserves more attention than it receives, as regards the lessons it conveys. There is no temptation that can come to us but what was in principle involved in the specific temptation to which he was subjected in the wilderness after his baptism. The consideration of his resistance to the suggestions of the tempter will help us in all our exposures to similar trial. Is it proposed to us to gratify some craving of the flesh in a forbidden direction? to make a vain-glorious or presumptuous use of spiritual privileges? to obtain temporal advantage by paying court to the enemies of God in any form? Cast our eyes to the wilderness of Judæa, and remember the principles asserted by the Lord in Scripture quotations, in answer to similar proposals. Thus looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, we shall be helped in the consideration of him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself. We shall be emboldened like him to make ourselves of no reputation, to carry the cross of self-denial, to make the Father's will the pleasure of our lives, and to choose rather to suffer

affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. This we shall not do in vain. It is only for a little while. At the last we shall know the unexplored depth of blessedness contained in the intimation that the object of it all, on the part of God, is "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus."

Christ's "Sermon on the Mount"

Obedience the great feature of the house of Christ.—Some of the things to be obeyed.—The "Sermon on the Mount."—Twenty-six or twenty-eight commands.—Light shining.—Anger.—"Offence."—Meekness.—Lust.—Cause of stumbling.—Oaths.—Non-resistance to evil.—Retaliation.—Not going to law.—A preliminary discipline for exaltation.—Giving, and to whom.—Loving enemies, but not loving the world.—Almsgiving in secret.—Prayer.—Forgiveness.—Spiritual modesty.—Against hoarding.—Laying up treasure in heaven.—Carefulness.—Seeking the kingdom.—Not judging.—The commandments of Christ opposed to human maxims.—Because the object is to train for the kingdom.—Spiritual prudence.—Asking.—Doing to others as we would be done by.—The strait gate.—False prophets.—Obedience and disobedience in their respective results.

WE are here, once again, to break bread and drink wine, not only from love of him whose memory is thus brought before us, but in obedience to his commandment: "Do this in remembrance of me." Obedience is the great lesson of the faith. It is the one great feature of the house of Christ. It is the one simple test by which his friends are to be found out, and by which they will be chosen and confessed in the day of his glory. Christ is "the author of eternal salvation to all THEM THAT OBEY HIM" (Heb. 5 : 9). We may know him well in a theoretical way, and be busy enough about his affairs in the department of doctrine, preaching, and contention; but if we obey not his commandments, he will disown us at the last, saying, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6 : 46). No truth is more distinctly or more constantly taught in the Word than this. It will, therefore, be time well spent if we look this morning at a few of the things he has commanded.

There is one part of his teaching in particular with which he has associated this explicit declaration: "Every one that heareth *these sayings of mine*, and doeth them NOT, shall be likened to a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and *it fell*: and great was *the fall of it*." The "sayings" and commandments to which he thus points with unmistakable significance, as regards their obligation on every believer who means to be found at the last with his house established on the rock,

are those which go to make up what is familiarly called "the Sermon on the Mount." All his "sayings" are binding on his brethren directly or indirectly; but there is a special solemnity in those so directly pointed to by himself, as those which will determine, in our obedience of them or otherwise, our position in the great day that will manifest every man's work, of what sort it is. It is, therefore, of peculiar importance that we consider them, so that we may escape classification at his coming with those of whom he elsewhere speaks as the servants that knew their Lord's will and did it not; or the servants that were ignorant of their Lord's will and consequently did it not; both of whom are to be among the punished, though the former are more severely dealt with than the latter.

Leaving aside the illustrative remarks and statements of collateral fact with which the discourse abounds, we may discover something like twenty-six or twenty-eight distinct commands which are obligatory on every believer of the Gospel if he would be accepted. Let us look at them briefly in the order in which he has given them.

1.—*Let your light shine before men.* In illustration of this, Jesus says, Men do not light a candle to put it under a bushel, but to set it on a candlestick. This is an intimation that those who receive the light of the truth do not receive it for their own advantage merely; but for exhibition to all around. They are lights kindled by God for irradiation into the surrounding darkness. It is, therefore, incumbent upon every believer to exhibit the light both in word and deed, whether the darkness comprehend it or not. This is the meaning of Christ's last message, "Let him that heareth say, Come." Every man having the truth who hides it, for whatever reason, or fails to show it to the extent in his power, is, therefore, disobedient. There is nothing in this commandment inconsistent with the other which forbids the parade of our good deeds before men to obtain their praise.

2.—*Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment.* Here our relation to brethren is made sacred. In former times, the law was against murder; but Jesus takes the law further, and prohibits the anger that leads to the murder, making a man guilty at the very inception of the crime, as it were. It is not anger in all cases, however, that is forbidden, but anger "without a cause," that is, without a just cause. No man would be angry with another absolutely without cause; but he may be angry for a reason that is not a good one. He may be angry at something that is really right in the other. In the scriptural sense, this is being angry without a cause; and the danger connected with such a mistake is here made a reason for great circumspection in the matter of giving reins to our disapprobation. It is the exhortation that Paul gives in another form, "Be angry and sin not" (Eph. 4 : 26). Be sure your anger is justifiable; and take care that even if it be a righteous anger, it does not lead you to unrighteous deeds. As for him that deliberately hateth his brother, John tells us he is a murderer (1 John 3 : 15). The cause of hate is generally that specified by John in the case of Cain and Abel: "And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous."

3.—*If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.* The allusion to the "altar" shows that at first this had reference to the worship connected

SEASONS OF COMFORT

with the Mosaic ritual, and therefore to the Jews who were his audience on the occasion ; but the precept is made binding, with all the others, upon all believers, Jews or Gentiles, till the end of the days, by the direction given by Christ to his apostles before he ascended : " Teach them (all nations) to observe all things *whatsoever I have commanded you* " (Matt. 28 : 20). We have, therefore, to accept it as an obligation from Christ that if we have done wrongfully to a brother, the recollection of his grievance against us should be a barrier to our approaches to God till the matter has been put right by reconciliation. There is, of course, such a thing as unjust accusation. The remedy in that case is in Matt. 18 : 15, unless we prefer the other course, of silently and patiently taking wrong, which in some cases is the preferable one (1 Cor. 6 : 7 ; 1 Pet. 2 : 19, 20).

4.—*Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him.* It is better to end strife in the shortest way. It is better to restore that which we have not taken away than strive at the risk of the loss of meekness. It is better to give place unto wrath than fight with unreasonable and wicked men. It is better to give in to unjust demands than engage in a conflict which will be to our hurt in a scriptural sense. " Doves " and " sheep " are the comparisons to which the Lord likens his brethren ; both of them creatures in which there is no " fight." The saints are lions at last, but not now. They are in training for that honour in being asked meanwhile to submit to evil.

5.—*Whoso looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.* As in murder, so in this : the law forbade the crime : Christ forbids those libidinous contemplations that lead to the crime. Thus he places our very thoughts in subjection, and helps us to attain that purity of heart that fits for the kingdom of God. The " motions of sin in our members " are involuntary ; and as to these, we can say with Paul, " It is no more I, but sin that dwelleth in me " : but if the propensities of the flesh are mentally indulged, they become sin. This is the teaching of the precept.

6.—*If thy right eye or right hand offend thee (or more properly, cause thee to offend), cast it from thee, that thy whole body perish not.* The literal eye and the literal hand cannot become a cause of spiritual stumbling. Hence the force of this command : that even if such were the case, our eye and hand must be sacrificed. This leaves no doubt as to our duty whenever anything—be it a habit, a friend, a connection, or what else—acts as a hindrance in the race. It is the duty expressed by Paul : " Lay aside *every weight*, and the sin that doth so easily beset." All things that are lawful are not necessarily " expedient " : do they hinder or help the work of the Gospel in us ? This is the simple test by which we may easily decide what is wise to be done. There are many enterprises, occupations, and things that, judged by this rule, will be let alone by spiritual men—enterprises, occupations and things which, while innocuous enough in themselves, are prosperously effected only at the peril of eternal life. Under this category, it would be easy to include large business aims, worldly friendships, scientific specialities, political and social hobbies, and fashionable pleasure taking.

7.—*Swear not at all, but let your communication be, Yea, yea ; Nay, nay.* What comment is needed here ? A simple, pure and truthful style of communication, free from the garniture of exaggerated emphasis of all

kinds, will characterize those who follow the precepts and examples of the Lord. Purity of speech helps purity of thought, and thus obedience is itself an aid to perfection.

8.—*Resist not evil ; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also.* This is the most difficult of all the commandments to obey. Perhaps this is why its obligation is least recognized and advocated, and its force sometimes frittered away by theories that make it of non-effect. It cannot be said that it is not plain, or that its meaning is difficult of understanding. Some say it applies only to the persecutions of the early ages. Jesus does not so limit it. Indeed, he does not apply it to persecutions at all as such. On the contrary, he connects it with ordinary civil matters as between man and man. He introduces it by a reference to the principle of judicial dealing established by the law of Moses : "Ye have heard that *it hath been said*, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." Now, on reference to Exod. 21 : 24, it will be found that this principle was laid down for the settlement of cases brought to the judges, and, therefore, referred to civil suits. Consequently, the new law that Christ laid down must apply in the same relation. Indeed, he so applies it : "If any man *sue thee at the law*, and take away thy coat (instead of acting on the eye for an eye principle, resist not the evil), let him have thy cloke also." Suing at the law is not the process of persecution ; therefore, it is not to circumstances of persecution that Jesus intends the application of this command, but to all the possible relations of life, and, therefore, to persecution as well. The attempt to limit it to persecution is gratuitous, strained, and unnatural. It would be strange if Christ forbade us to defend him, but left us at liberty to defend ourselves. Others again, admitting it applies to process of law, contend that it applies only to the case of brethren doing evil to us or bringing law against us ; that is, that we are not to resist evil if a brother is the evil-doer ; that we are not to defend ourselves at law if a brother is the suitor, grounding this view on 1 Cor. 6. But this is equally untenable. Christ says "If ANY man" do thus and so, we are not to resist. He does not say "any brother." But, says the objector, the Sermon on the Mount was addressed to the Lord's disciples. This is true, but does not divert the application of the commandment. The discourse, though addressed to the disciples, related to their doings and submission towards *men who were not disciples*. Thus Jesus says a few sentences farther on, "Love your enemies . . . if ye salute your *brethren only*, what do ye more than others ?" There will be no question here that Jesus, though speaking to his disciples, speaks of their relation to other men. Therefore, when he says, "If any man sue thee at the law," he means, "any man," and not "any brother." It would be strange if he allowed us to defend ourselves from wolves and not from wolves in sheep's clothing. It is evident that it is to our dealings with wolves in every shape that his words apply. If he prohibits defence at law, it would certainly follow that prosecution at law is excluded, even if he had not excluded it in express words. But he has not left this to inference. He says, "Of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again" (Luke 6 : 30). It is natural to say that such a line of action would bring ruin, and that in fact these commandments are "impracticable." But this does not dispose of the commandments. There they are still ; and we are not

warranted in considering the consequences of obeying them. It is dangerous to consider consequences in this relation. If Abraham had been governed by the doctrine of consequences when commanded to offer up his son Isaac, he would have hesitated and lost the blessing. If we are the children of God, we are in the school of obedience, and it is an expressly appointed feature of this school that the path of obedience is a path of suffering. Obedience is not tested by the command to do what is agreeable. It is the command to do contrary to what our natural impulses incline us to that puts us to the test. No impulse of nature is stronger than self-defence : consequently, no more powerful or constantly operative discipline of submission to the will of God could be established in the house of God than the command, during the ascendancy of Gentilism in the world, to " resist not evil." The command is associated with promise : " Vengeance is mine : I will repay, saith the Lord." So that faith is called into exercise as well as submission by the command to be subject, for conscience sake. It is a question of waiting God's time for vindication. It is a hard precept, perhaps ; but we are not at liberty to disobey the hard precepts. The way is expressly made narrow : the broad way is easy and pleasant.

But some think this is making the way narrower than it is. God forbid that such should be done. Wisdom is only anxious to exhibit and uphold Christ's way. The commandments are his : woe to the man that adds to or takes away from them. They are not weakened by the lapse of eighteen centuries. It remains as true now as when Christ said so, that the man that " heareth these sayings and *doeth them* " is the man who will be established at his coming. But, asks another objector, " Is not all that Christ means, this : that we are not personally to resent injury or seek redress, but leave it to the constituted authorities, who are the appointed ministers of God to us for good ? " The obvious answer to this is that it is not the mode of seeking redress with which the discourse of Christ on the mountain deals, but with the fact of seeking it at all. He does not say, " If men take away thy goods, ask them not again personally, but ask them by the policeman." He says, " Ask them not again." Asking them by the policeman is asking them again. Besides, to what meaningless purport such a qualification would reduce all his commandments ! It would put Jesus as a teacher on a level with the Town Clerk of Ephesus, when he said, " If Demetrius, and the craftsmen that are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies : let them implead one another " (Acts 19 : 38), and it would reduce the commandments to absurdity. " Resist not evil," would mean, " Resist not by your own hands, but resist by the law which is mightier than you." " If a man smite thee on the one cheek, turn the other also," would mean, " Submit to the smiter till the policeman arrives, and then smite both the cheeks of the smiter by the hand of the policeman." So also, " If a man sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also, till you are able to bring a cross-action and recover not only your cloke and coat but damages also ! " Such a style of construing the commandments of Christ would reduce his teaching to the mere inculcation of orderly citizenship of this world, to which he said he and his disciples did not belong : whereas the higher view shows him putting his friends under a preliminary discipline for the exaltation which awaits the obedient of them in the kingdom of God. The question is

settled by the comparison of his friends to "sheep in the midst of wolves," and by his own example of passiveness under all the injuries and insults of men. Sheep don't fight. They fly from the wolves, and if bitten they are content to escape. God certainly makes use of the powers that be to restrain evil and preserve a situation favourable to the working out of His purpose with the saints ; but he does not permit them to make use of them as agents in the doing what they are forbidden to do for themselves. What a man does by the law, he does himself. By this, he can more destructively smite his enemy on the cheek than if he tried it with his own hands. What virtue in withholding a blow with your own hand if it is only that you may inflict a heavier one through the resistless and cruel instruments of the law? Doing good to them that hate and hurt you excludes the resort to all retribution—by the law or otherwise.

9.—*Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.* This is but an enforcement of the other commandment : "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Men love their neighbours when they are well off, and are ready to do people a good turn who are not particularly in need of it. Christ would have us show our neighbourliness towards those who fall into misfortune ; for this is his own illustration of the point in answer to the question, "Who is my neighbour?" (see Luke 10 : 29-37). A man fell among thieves who robbed and abused him, and left him half dead. A stranger picked him up and attended to him. Christ's moral to the case is contained in the words : "Go, and do thou likewise." This is the principle of the commandment under consideration. "Give to him that asketh," which, of course, is the man in need. Turn not away from his entreaties. The usual practice is to stop the ear at the cry of the poor. This may be convenient and profitable at present, but there will come a bitter sequel (Prov. 21 : 13). The commandment is to do good unto all as opportunity arises. The reason of the commandment is : "That ye may be the children of the Highest." The political economist may say, "There is no end to this ; everybody should look after their own poor." The answer is, there is an end to life and an end to our trial, and our business is to act on Christ's precepts, and not on the worldly-wise maxims of a generation without God. The poor we have always with us : and the man who wearies at the constant test is a man who wearies in well-doing, and will fail to reap in the "due season" of the Divine harvest which is fast coming on. But God is not unreasonable. Where a man has not to spare (which is the case of the majority), he cannot give to every one that asketh. In that case, he will say with Peter, who was asked to give alms to the cripple at the gate of the temple : "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee." The principle of the commandment is to consider the need of others as it comes under our notice and not to shut up our bowels of compassion.

10.—*Love your enemies ; bless them that curse you ; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you.* This may be difficult, but becomes possible and even easy at last to such as come under the power of the Spirit in the constant reading and meditation of the word. There are many senses in which it is true that "all things are possible to them that believe." The love of enemies and well-doing to the malicious are not native to the natural man (and we all have the natural man). But

SEASONS OF COMFORT

the natural man has to be brought under the supremacy of the spiritual man's rules of action. The old man has to be crucified : the victory must be achieved, or we are the vanquished instead of the victorious. The victory that overcometh is our faith. This enables us, with eyes on Christ, to entertain benevolent regards towards those who are at enmity with us ; to do good, when opportunity arises, to those who would destroy us ; and to pray for their well-being. These dispositions, however, do not in true saints work against those other commandments enjoined and exemplified extensively in the New Testament, which require us to make no friendship with the world and to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness nor to associate with brethren who walk contrary to the truth. The love to enemies exists as a sentiment that would desire and seek to promote their well-being without interfering with the law of God, which forbids us to "help the ungodly, or love them that hate the Lord" (2 Chron. 19 : 2). Christ and the apostles may be taken as the right exemplification of this precept. Jesus, though animated by the highest benevolence, denounced his enemies as "hypocrites," wolves in sheep's clothing, graves filled with rottenness (Matt. 23), and looked on them with anger (Mark 3 : 5). So with Paul, Peter, and the other apostles, though obedient to this commandment of Christ, to love their enemies and pray for them, they assumed towards them an attitude of pronounced and uncompromising opposition, and spoke of them in terms of wholesale condemnation (Acts 13 : 10 ; 2 Pet. 2 : 12-19 ; Jude 10-16). To the mind not practically experienced in the matter, there may appear to be some contradiction here. There is none in reality. In the abstract (as to what you would do if your enemies would allow it), you may love them, feeling towards them a benevolent desire for their good, which, as opportunity serves, you may even carry into practical effect ; and yet be compelled to antagonize and oppose and contend with them in the attitude they assume towards the things of God. The existence of your real sentiments may be clouded from view by the circumstances surrounding you, as in the case of the Lord among the Pharisees ; but its existence is there all the same, and shows itself negatively, at all events, in the absence of effort to hurt. The difference between those who are controlled by this precept and those who are not, is perhaps more evident when power to hurt is possessed. The righteous man is free from malice, and refrains from inflicting harm ; the man of the flesh embraces the opportunity without mercy, and schemes to create the opportunity of inflicting evil if it does not exist. The spirit of the commandment may be apprehended by considering God, whom we are commanded to imitate. All His designs are based in love ; but, with the wicked, He is angry, and will at last destroy them, though not willing that they should perish. Nothing, however, will more foster the commandment than the observance of its letter.

11.—*When thou doest thine alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.* This commandment has a purifying effect. It forbids the disclosure of our almsgiving to human knowledge. Many things are done for the sake of human opinion, as with the Pharisees, who, like mankind at the present day, "loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." This is a corrupt source of well-doing. In fact, deeds emanating from such a motive are defiled, and not reckoned as well-doing. "Let thine alms be

in secret," says Jesus; "and thy Father, *who seeth in secret,* shall himself reward thee openly." The tendency of this precept is to make us frame our purposes and do our deeds without reference to man, and in view only of Him whose eyes are in every place beholding the evil and the good. Thus our works become "wrought in God."

12.—*When thou prayest, enter into thy closet.* Prayer in secret is genuine prayer. Prayer in the presence of others is not necessarily so. Christ inculcates privacy in the matter; not that he excludes public address to the Father in season; for he himself exemplified this phase (John 11 : 41, 42), and Paul also (Acts 27 : 35). But he enjoins the same secrecy, on the whole, in this matter, as in almsgiving. Men of God pray much in secret, as Jesus did, who often withdrew himself to solitude to pray (Luke 6 : 12), and Daniel, who did so three times a day (Dan. 6 : 10), and the Psalmist, who seven times a day gave thanks and praise (Psalm 119 : 164). The men who pray most in secret pray best in public; for the genuineness of their private habit infuses itself into their public petitions. Mere formality in prayer-saying is a transparent abomination.

The rest of the commandments contained in the Sermon on the Mount are simple and perhaps of easier reception than some of the foregoing.

13.—*Use not vain repetitions in prayer.* 14.—*Forgive those who offend against you.*

15.—*When you mourn before God, do not parade the fact before men, but anoint thy head and wash thy face.* 16.—*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth.*

This, perhaps, is an exception to the easiness. Here is a common practice condemned. To accumulate property is considered a virtue. It is enjoined as an "honourable ambition," and sanctioned by so many high-sounding and pleasant phrases of commendation that men get at last to think it is positively a highly moral achievement to make money. There is certainly no more sure way of securing the good opinions of men than to get rich. But there is another side to the subject; that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. The possession of riches is an inheritance of great peril. A rich man needs to be more anxious and careful towards God than a poor man. It is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. So declared Christ, who knew what was in man, and who here gives us this commandment, forbidding us to get into the position of rich men. He commands us to (17) *lay up our treasures in heaven.* Paul and Peter tell us how this is to be done (1 Tim. 6 : 18, 19), by using the goodness of God that may be in our hands in the blessing of those who are destitute, and in the doing and contriving of those things that shall be for the welfare of men in the Gospel. Very few—scarcely any—receive this doctrine; but there it is, to judge us at the last. It is no doctrine of human invention. It is too much opposed to human instincts for that. It is Christ's direction to those who would follow him. But it is now as it was in the days of Paul, who, speaking of professors, says, "All seek their own." Yet God has opened the hearts of a few, by the power of His Word, to obey His Word, to give themselves as living sacrifices for the work of His house. The time is too short to hope for much increase in the number of these, but His Word will accomplish that for which it has been sent. 18.—*Take no thought (anxious care) for your life,* is a plain precept, and difficulty only for those who have not learnt to have that faith in God which Christ commands; and without which, we are no sons of His. So also is it with 19.—*Seek first*

SEASONS OF COMFORT

the kingdom of God. 20.—*Judge not.* 21.—*Cast not pearls before swine.*—
22.—*Ask, seek, knock.* 23.—*Do unto men as ye would they should do unto you.*
24.—*Enter in at the strait gate.* 25.—*Beware of false prophets.*

It is with reference to all these commandments that Jesus utters the solemn words : “ Whosoever heareth *these sayings of mine*, and DOETH THEM NOT, shall be likened unto a foolish man that built his house upon the sand : and the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house ; and it fell : and great was the fall of it.” They are, therefore, of a peculiar obligation one and all. Of what avail will our knowledge and acknowledgment of him be, if we disobey his commandments ? It is to be feared that many a man knows the truth in its theoretical outline who is habitually disobedient in relation to some, if not all, of these precepts. It is a sad and discouraging fact that men zealous of “ doctrine ” may be heedless of the commandments. Must we draw a veil over the commandments to please men ? Let those do so who are not the servants of Christ. It is saying the truth to say that they look in vain for salvation, who, with the profoundest understanding of the mysteries of God, combine an habitual violation of the commandments that Christ has given for our obedience during his absence.

Those commands are opposed to the maxims of human wisdom because their object is altogether different from what men propose to themselves in the adoption of any rules of conduct. Men usually act in defence of self-interest. The object of Christ’s commandments is to educate us for the kingdom of God, the first law of which is the obedience of God, and the ultimate object of which is glory to Him and blessing to all mankind. Therefore, his commandments teach us to disregard self-interest as a motive of action, and to have God and our neighbour distinctly before us.

Men would not be in harmony with His great purpose unless they were themselves taught and disciplined in those principles upon which that purpose hinges ; and they cannot be taught in these otherwise than in the way God has appointed in the obedience of commandments which are contrary to the flesh and which we perform for the sake of him who hath given them to us for our exercise and proof towards him. In view of this, it is a mistake to discuss the human consequences of anything he has commanded. He requires us in case of need to sacrifice our very lives in his obedience ; and no other consequence need be considered by the side of this. The consequence to be considered is the consequence in the presence of Christ at his coming. By setting aside his commandments, we may save ourselves from inconvenience and harm now, but it will be at the expense of his approbation then ; and what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul ? A glorious revolution is in store, and is now even at the door, when the poor and the afflicted and the out-cast and down-trodden and the slain of those who are obedient to Christ will be exalted in wealth and honour and renown in the day when it will be said to the purple-and-fine-linen despisers of Christ : “ Thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things : but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.”

The Man of Sorrows

The origin of the breaking of bread.—The feast of the Passover.—Christ's inclination to celebrate it.—Interesting phases of Christ's character.—His susceptibility to sorrow.—The doctrine of indifference.—“ Foolishness with God.”—A sober meeting in that upper room.—The oil of consolation.—The cross and the crown.—New symbols.—Christ as the bread of life.—Love.—Glowing attachment.—Mutual excellence.—The Captain of our Salvation.—The wisdom of God.—Power, excellence, goodness, and authority combine.—The body of common nature with the head.—Not illustrated at present.—In process of development.—A discouraging mistake.—In the future a whole family of glorious sons and daughters.—Christ unbosoming his grief to his disciples.—The Spirit-seed before the Spirit-fruits can come.—The despised Bible.—This golden cistern.—Methodical and attentive reading.—The study of particular subjects not good.—We must have all the elements of growth.—Neglecting no corners, giving no preference.—The pearl of great price.

THE occasion of the origin of this institution (the breaking of bread), is one of deep interest from many points of view. That occasion was an observance required by the Law of Moses, in celebration of Israel's deliverance from Egypt—the feast of unleavened bread, otherwise called the feast of the Passover, from the passover lamb slain in connection with it, and a typical celebration of the greater deliverance to be effected through Jesus, as the slain Lamb of the great scheme of human redemption. As a Jew, “made of a woman, *made under the law*” (Gal. 4 : 4), Jesus, who came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil, was forward in readiness to obey this as all other of the Mosaic requirements. But he had a special inclination to celebrate the passover on this occasion. His disciples having been given directions as to the place where it was to be eaten, they went and made ready; and in the evening, at the appointed hour they came together. “With desire,” he said, “I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.” The attempt to realize the origin of this desire brings many interesting phases of Christ's character under review. His susceptibility to sorrow is a prominent feature. “My soul,” he said, “is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death!” Why was he labouring under this weight of sorrow? The prospect he had before his mind, affords the answer. He was about to be deserted by his friends, and delivered to the heartless mob. He was about

SEASONS OF COMFORT

to be given up to the authority of the law, like a common felon. He was about to be abandoned to the ravening wolves who thirsted for his life; to be given over to insult and violence at the hands of hypocrites, who had been prophetically styled in the Psalms, "dogs and bulls of Bashan"; and to be put to the most agonizing and ignominious death which it was possible for man to suffer. A prospect like this was enough to fill his soul with darkness.

Paganism has glorified the doctrine of indifference, and the world accounts stoicism as heroic. But this no more savours of true wisdom than the many other doctrines of the ancient schools, which Paul has pronounced to be foolishness with God. An exquisite nature like that of "the Holy One of God," which the sins and miseries of men alone weighed down with sorrow and made acquainted with grief, was not likely to be insensible to so great a woe as was about then to overwhelm him. The desertion of friends, the withdrawal of the divine presence and protection, the triumph of hypocrisy and barbarism (though but for a moment), and the agonies of outraged nature, were terrible to his soul just in proportion as the reverse of all these conditions was his delight. He was not insensible to the sorrows of our common nature. "We have not an high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are." He groaned under the weight of his load. He sweat, as it were, great drops of blood. He prayed earnestly that if it were possible the cup might pass from him (Luke 22 : 44). He did not refuse to drink it, if the plan of divine love required it. "The cup which my Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it?" he said (John 18 : 11) : and in view of the suggestion, that the hour might pass from him, he said, "For this cause came I unto this hour" (John 12 : 27). It pleased the Lord to bruise him; to put him to grief (Isa. 53 : 10), and grievous was the burden of his sorrow which cast a mantle of gloom over the days of his flesh, when with strong crying and tears he offered up prayers to Him that was able to save, and was heard in that he feared (Heb. 5 : 7). We can understand why this sorrow should increase with the approach of the bitter hour, and why he should look, with some degree of consolation, to the unbosoming of his sorrow which was to take place at the eating of the passover.

It was a sober meeting in that upper room, when all outside was feasting and gladness. "All ye shall be offended because of me this night," said he. The pain and perplexity of the disciples, caused by this remark, can be imagined, especially when he added : "Verily I say unto you, One of you shall betray me." The simple loyalty of the disciples could but unite with Peter's exclamation, "Though all men forsake thee, yet will not I." Yet they could not penetrate the portentous sayings of their Master, whose wisdom they had learnt to have in awe, though his teachings they did not at all times comprehend. They sat still in the cloud, and waited while light began to break. Having unburdened his own soul, Jesus proceeded to pour the oil of consolation into their smarting wounds. "Let not your hearts be troubled," he said; "ye believe in God, believe

also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions : if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you." Herein have we the connection between the cross and the crown. The sorrow of the hour was but part of the work of preparation for the Great House of the Father, whose presence (" the tabernacle of God with men ") shall lead to a wiping away of tears, and a blotting out of every curse and all death. The first " going " of the Lord in the work of preparation was " to prison and to death." This was the cup that could not pass. If the Lord had not died, men would not have been saved, nor mansions developed. Death had passed upon all through sin, under the law which constituted death the wages of sin ; and it had pleased the Father to require this law to be fully upheld as the basis of the scheme by which salvation had come by Christ. Without the blood of a sinless representative, the covenants of promise must remain a dead letter. Without the slaying of the lamb, there could be no " passing over " by the angel of death.

This mystery Jesus, after the unburdening of his sorrow, proceeds to bring before his disciples in new symbols, in the use of which he laid a new basis for the fellowship of his friends, and established a new bond of connection between himself as THE TRUTH, and all who should come unto God by him. " As they were eating (the pass-over), he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it and gave to his disciples, saying ' Take this, and divide it among yourselves. This is my body broken for you. This do in remembrance of me.' And likewise the cup, when he had given thanks, saying, ' This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you : drink ye all of it.' " This brings Christ forward as the bread of life, in the partaking of whom by the truth, we become constituents of the ONE BODY. It places him in the position of the Head, the First, the Alpha and Omega, of the salvation of God ; and, in this respect, the " Lord's Supper " is a continual protest against the fancies of men by which they hope to save themselves without Christ. It is also a continual profession of subjection on the part of all true disciples, and a continual remembrance of those things which are apt to pass out of mind. The fealty of the one Body and the supremacy of the Lord, as head and husband, root and vine, are the most glorious and characteristic features of the system which centres in Christ. This mutual relation is tempered by the highest love. The Lord loves the ecclesia. Hence the latter sing : " Thou hast loved us, and washed us from our sins in thine own blood." Also, Paul says that men ought to love their wives " even as the Lord the ecclesia." This love is returned. " All that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and in truth," is Paul's description of such as constitute the ecclesia. Where this reciprocated love does not exist, the relation to Christ is not by him recognized. " Except a man love me . . . he cannot be my disciple."

Now, consider this feature, and you will find it has in it the greatest glory conceivable to the human mind. We never see a finer thing on earth than love. We do not see it often in its perfect form, because the conditions necessary for its full play are rarely met.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

There is plentiful and abundant scope for the love that takes the form of benevolence : kindness to the afflicted, attention to the humble and poorly-gifted, and almsgiving to the poor. These are godly manifestations, and satisfying to the doer ; but the glowing attachment that is gendered by the mutual exhibition of excellence—the luxury of requited noble love—is a flower of heaven that grows not by the way-side. It is to be met with in secret corners, now and then blooming like the violet unseen, and coming never to maturity then, unless the good seed of the kingdom is the germ of the flower. In the Captain of our Salvation the conditions of love exist in their fulness. Presented to us as the object of supreme attachment—attachment to whom is the indispensable condition of discipleship—we have in him, as Paul expresses it, “ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge ” (Col. 2 : 3). He is the wisdom of God manifested in an individual of our race. He is the “ power of God,” to whom is committed all power in heaven and in earth. He is the goodness of God ; “ God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself ” (2 Cor. 5 : 19). Wisdom, power, excellence, goodness, and authority combine to make him altogether lovely, and this loveliness is made to shine with greater power into our hearts by the fact that he died for and gives life to us, but for which, we should never have risen above the level of the perishing races around. We can love him without danger of recoil. No inferior manifestation on his part will ever cool our ardour or tire our preference. He is the focus of the covenanted goodness ; the head of the body ; the centre of the circle, the nucleus of the glorious family, the beginning of the new creation ; the spirit of the system ; the life of the community.

“ As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.” The body is of common nature with the head. The younger members of the family bear resemblance to the Elder Brother. The wisdom, nobility, and love of the head radiate to the utmost member, and impart beauty and health to the whole alike. We may not see this illustrated at present. The one body, of whom these things are affirmed, is only in process of development. Its principal constituents are in the womb of the night. The gates of Hades enclose the multitude of sleeping saints. The few who are in the land of the living are set in ungodly surroundings, and in association with many who have the name but not the spirit of the calling. In the family as it exists in the state of probation, there is much that is adventitious and destined to be rejected. This is needful to the effectual proving of the genuine. The aspect of the family in the land of the living will disappoint those who consider it in the light of its divine ideal. They make a discouraging mistake who look to find the heavenly excellences in every professed member of the bride. Only a few will be saved. The divine ideal will not be realized till all the children of God scattered abroad (living and dead) are “ gathered together in one ” (John 11 : 52) ; and presented to Christ by himself, a glorious ecclesia, without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing (Eph. 5 : 27). Keeping the eye on this, faith can feed, and purpose in Christ grow strong. We can see in the future a whole family of glorious sons

and daughters, among whom will be no liars, cold hearts or fools—a community of righteous men in perfect health, with boundless wealth, unwearying faculty, overflowing love, and everlasting joy. Oh, the glory of the divine purpose in Christ. It is the substance of the shadowy visions which cross the dreams of poets and philosophers ; but a substance that can never be reached by them. They are out of the channel of its development. In God only can it be found. It cannot be reached outside of His way. His way is in Christ, and the philosophers and poets reject Christ, though in words they profess to admire him. The way of Christ has been made known by his ambassadors, the apostles, and the safety of perishing man lies only in hearing their word.

To see Christ unbosom his grief to his disciples, and soothe the sorrow caused by his words, is to learn that if we belong to the Christ community, we are not callous theorists or unsanctified dealers in “doctrines” that touch not our feelings and move not our sentiments ; but on the contrary, the love of Christ constraineth us, “because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead : and that he died for all, that they that live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor. 5 : 14-15). This love is one of the fruits of the Spirit, which will only grow in well-tended soil. The “good and honest heart” is the good ground that will yield a harvest to this culture ; but without the culture, the harvest will not come. Natural goodness and honesty of heart will not of themselves bring forth the fruits of the Spirit, any more than rich garden ground will grow roses and gooseberries without planting. Good ground will grow nettles as easily as bad ground, and a little more luxuriantly if it is turned to that use. An excellent constitution of mind requires the Spirit-seed before the Spirit-fruits can come. “The good seed is the word of the kingdom” ; the descending rain is to be found in the Spirit shed upon us through the prophets and apostles, to the refreshment of our dry and thirsty souls. From thence issues the water of life, which the Spirit invites us to drink, that in the end we may thirst no more. In plain speaking, the root of the matter is to be found in the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. The despised Bible, which perverted people call a dead letter, is this golden fountain. Daily companionship in diligent, methodical and attentive reading and continual meditation on its many and wonderful unfoldings, will gender and nourish the fruits of the Spirit, and cause a gradual but certain growing up into Christ our living head. It will bring about in us a like-mindedness to him, renewing the spirit of our mind, and strengthening the image of the new man, which has been formed within us by the truth.

The study of particular subjects will not bring this result. A man is likely to be a dry and sapless branch who feeds on one extracted element of the vine-juice. The kingdom alone without the God of the kingdom and the purpose of the kingdom, will generate spiritual idiocy. The signs of the time, without the two great commandments on which hang all the law and the prophets, will

SEASONS OF COMFORT

gender hardness of heart. The mortality of human nature studied by itself will produce a monster ; the " state of the dead," spiritual moles and bats ; earth creatures, who delight to burrow in the " dust and ashes " of this state of humiliation, insensible to the noble aspirations after the higher ways, to which Christ is the door. God-manifestation by itself will give us a scorching glare, that will parch the ground, and spread desolation. In the spiritual, as in the natural, we must have all the elements of growth, in order to have a healthy life of the creature, or healthy fructification of the soil. Let us have the air, earth, and sky of God's entire word ; the refreshing shower, as well as the invigorating breeze ; the moon that walks in her brightness, as well as the glorious orb of day ; the ploughing, and harrowing, and planting, as well as watering and garnering ; the ramble on the mountain side, as well as the meditative rest at home. We must have all that goes to make up a healthy life. We must have the glory of the promises, the beauty of holiness, the sweetness of love, the tenderness of compassion, the brightness of hope, the vigour of good sense, faith in the mysteries, intelligence in the signs, taste for the first principles, skill in strong meat. All these will combine to make a lovable, interesting, and useful man in Christ Jesus ; but this can only be reached by continual presence in the word, a daily picking up over the breadth of its richly-furnished fields, neglecting no corners, giving no preference to any part, but honouring, and studying, and treasuring all alike. Thus will the man of God be thoroughly furnished unto all good works. The labour is not great, but continuous. It is like the small economies which, steadily practised, lead to wealth ; little by little, till more is in your hands than you know. The result in this case is beyond all price, and, therefore, worth all perseverance. It is, indeed, the pearl of great price, which a wise man will dispense with everything to obtain. It is the one thing needful, which secured, will never be taken away. It leads to the blessedness which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard ; nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. " Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee ; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men " (Psa. 31 : 19).

Altogether Vanity

“All vanity and vexation of spirit.”—The coffin the goal of the unjustified sons of Adam.—A better lot for man.—This beautiful world yet a habitation of joy.—Men seek good wherein is none.—The want of understanding.—The ignorant agricultural labourer.—Commercial faith.—The Stock Exchange.—In spiritual matters the world nearly all clod-hoppers.—No faith in the spiritual “stock.”—The historic reality of Christ.—The certainty that he rose from the dead and now lives.—Fact No. 1 : a fame of Christ.—Fact No. 2 : the incessant agitation of Christ’s disciples.—The first century.—The apostles before us as eye-witnesses.—They told the same story in different parts of the world.—Their own personal eye-witness.—The testimony related to facts seen and heard.—Their testimony cannot be got rid of.—Christ rose.—Christ will come again.—The only sane course.—Glad tidings of great joy.—“Justification by faith.”—Scriptural justification.—The forgiveness of sins.—Does not ensure final salvation.—Salvation is “not of works” ; yet works will determine everything.—The unjustified man’s position.—Cling to the word.—Let no man take your crown.

It is indeed true, as we have been singing, that few are the days, and vain the strength, and empty the joys of man. The saying that “all is vanity and vexation of spirit” is hackneyed, but terribly real, as applied to this life apart from the blessed hope. The finest intellect grows dim and twinkles out at last ; the sublimest powers wane before the decay of years. The most splendid honour shrivels in the presence of death. Friends with their pleasantness and favours avail nothing to avert the unalterable doom. Riches, with all their surroundings of ease and elegance, are powerless to stay the hand of the Destroyer that sweeps all, at last, into the pitiless abyss of oblivion. The dread consummation hurries. Death walks in the noonday, and the thousands fall before him. Every soul is ultimately included ; every good destroyed. The finest estate has to be left ; the fondest desire surrendered ; the largest fortune given to others. “Every man at his best estate is altogether vanity.” The coffin is the goal : the fret and sweat, the anxiety and the effort, the hopes and the achievements, the laughter and tears of life, as lived by the unjustified sons of Adam, end in the quietness of the grave.

But there is a better lot for man, if he would but put forth the hand. We behold not in the earth, as we see it now, the consummation of the divine purpose therewith. A poor outcome it would be of the stupendous power and wisdom we see at work on sea and land, if there were to be nothing higher than the incessant coming and going of perishing races, and the highest of these an abortion. No, no ! A destiny commensurate with the marvellous power put forth

in its creation and maintenance, is in store for this beautiful world. A habitation of joy will it be when the work is finished—a sparkling gem of the imperishable universe. All wisdom and righteousness and excellence, and love and favour, and goodness, and strength and beauty will crown the blessed heads and swell with praise the hearts of the redeemed multitude that will be revealed with the rising of the sun, at the end of this dismal night of darkness and nightmare. This is the sum of the great and precious promises made sure by transactions of unimpeachable historic record.

Yet men turn away from this glory to be revealed. They seek good in that wherein is none. They spend their money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not. They hew themselves cisterns that can hold no water. They turn away from the real and lasting concerns of the divine purpose and bestow supreme attention on the concerns of this passing life, which, though important in their own place, are trifles in comparison with the things that are of God. Like the miser in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, they scrape among the muck, while the angel stands over them with an offered crown.

What is the meaning of this almost universal infatuation? It has an explanation, but the explanation involves many details, which there is no time to elaborate now. Briefly stated, it may be defined as the want of understanding. In spiritual things, the generality of mankind are what the agricultural labourer may be supposed to be in relation to "stock" as trafficked in by a broker on 'Change. "Stock" is a commercial fiction. In its right relation, it may be the doorway to all the realities of this life; but actually, it has no existence except in the brains of those who deal in it. It is an artificial embodiment of the value attached to houses and lands, and minerals, and merchandise. In itself, it is a nothing, though vastly productive of wealth, when skilfully manipulated. Now, the ignorant agricultural labourer knows nothing about stock. He understands turnips and potatoes. He can see, and handle, and appreciate them, and has no objection to buy a field of them from his neighbour, if he can do so at a low price. But suppose a commercial visitor offer him stock! Perhaps the visitor is of a benevolent turn; and perhaps he happens to know that a particular stock is going up, and that his acquaintance on the farm would make a fortune if he could be persuaded to invest his little savings in it. What does the rustic say to it? He shakes his head. If it were "fat stock" he could understand, but stock that he can neither handle, nor see, nor understand, is beyond him; so he concludes to leave it alone, and stick to his potatoes. His visitor pities his stupidity, and goes away to invest as largely as he can in the artificial article which the other has despised. He has understanding of the matter, and the other has not. By the eye of commercial faith, he sees fortune through the invisible article which he buys at the Stock Exchange, and by an act of commercial insight, secures, in a single week, more potatoes and turnips, and houses and lands, than the other could get in twenty lifetimes.

So it is in spiritual matters. The world has many who can see the turnips and potatoes of this mortal existence ; they can appreciate clothes on the back, money in the pocket, bread in the cupboard ; they can understand working night and day to get a house over their heads ; but to talk to them of justification, and faith and obedience, the promises, and sowing to the spirit, and heirship of the kingdom of God, and they do worse than shake their heads : they spurt out, "Theological trash !" and pronounce you a fool. The gospel is a mythical affair with these children of the flesh. The short-sighted deluded creatures ! There is at last more even of their real things in the gospel than they can ever reach with all their pains. There is life and health, and wealth, and honour, and joy, more abundant than they ever dreamt of. They do not see the connection. They have no faith in the spiritual stock, because their understanding is darkened. That is their misfortune. We are here this morning as representing a happier state. We surround this table because we are better informed. We know how faith in the unseen verities of the gospel will lead at last to things more seen and tangible than those the world now hugs with fond desire.

The foundation of the matter lies in the fact symbolized on the table. Our stock has for its basis the historic reality of Christ, and we know that this is a reality—our enemies themselves being witnesses. We are not dealing with matters of surmise and speculation. We have not followed cunningly-devised fables. The historic reality of Christ defies all the efforts of the keenest criticism to overturn it. Unbelievers have given up the attempt and changed their tactics. They admit the historic reality, but try to explain it away, which is more futile than denying it altogether. We take our stand on the historic reality. We have not seen Christ, but we are certain he was, and is, and is to come. We have not seen China, but we are certain there is such a place. Why ? Because many people tell us there is. But how are we sure they do not lie ? Because people of ordinary sanity do not lie without an object. An incessant uniform testimony of personal knowledge, where no selfish object is served by the testimony, is a guarantee of the truth of the thing testified. Where the testimony brings disadvantage on the testifier, the rule is all the stronger. On this principle, we are as certain there is a place called China as if we had been there ; and on the same principle (strengthened by the second condition named), we are as certain there was a man Christ Jesus in Judæa 1,800 years ago, as if we had been alive and seen him ; and on the same principle, we are certain he rose from the dead and now lives. We begin with facts open to the eyes of all men. It is not a matter of speculation or opinion at all. Here is a fact : A fame of Christ fills the world ; millions of people believe on him though they do not understand him. How came they to believe ? This introduces a second fact : The people of the present day have inherited their belief from forefathers, but how did the belief begin ? This we have on the witness of history, apart from the New Testament ; history admitted by unbelievers to be true. We have the testimony of the Roman historians, that the foundation

SEASONS OF COMFORT

of it was laid by the incessant agitation of Christ's disciples, in the teeth of persecution, in the first century. This testimony, which is given in a very superficial and incidental way, is amplified in the writings of the apostles. By the concurrence of these two sources of evidence, we have the apostles before us as actually as if we were eyewitnesses of their operations. We hear their voices as it were. What is it they say to us as we listen? We hear them declare that Jesus Christ, whom Pontius Pilate had publicly executed, was raised from the dead, and was offered to men as a means of eternal life through faith in him. They one and all made this declaration. They all told the same story in different parts of the world; and in all places, the result was the same—opposition, insult, spoliation, and death. This is proof positive that they believed what they said. To prove this is, in the circumstances of the case, to prove the truth of what they said: for upon what ground did they declare that Christ had risen? Because someone had convinced them? Because someone else in whom they had confidence had seen him? No, No! They declared it on the authority of *their own personal eyewitness*. "We are his witnesses," they said (Acts 10:39). "We ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead (verse 41). "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" says Paul; "he was seen of me as one born out of due time." Not only did they declare they had seen him since he rose, but they testified that he was with them forty days, precluding the idea that their sight of him could be an illusion, and furthermore that he had taken a formal leave of them, and ascended in their presence to heaven, leaving a promise of return. Now prove the honesty of men as applied to testimony like this, and you prove the testimony itself. Where a witness of proved honesty testifies to facts of which he declares himself personally cognizant, his testimony is accepted as proof in every court of law, even when it is not against his interest to give the testimony; but where the testimony tells against himself, confidence is established ten-fold. Now in the case of the apostles, the testimony related to facts seen and heard. "We cannot," says Peter, "but speak the things we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). Hence, the evidence of their integrity which their submission to evil consequences affords, is evidence of the truth of their testimony. If it is not, there is no such thing as proving anything on testimony and our courts of law are a farce. But there is such a thing as proving on testimony—the everyday practices of all society being proof; and the only reason why the process is so strenuously resisted in the case of the apostles, is because there is an intense desire to get rid of the fact which their testimony proves. But it cannot be done. The competence of the apostles to give evidence (proved by their logical, clear and forcible epistles), and the honesty evinced in the course they pursued, together establish beyond the possibility of refutation the fact that the crucified Christ rose; and if Christ rose, Christ lives; and if Christ lives, Christ will come again; and if Christ come again, he will take possession of the kingdoms of the world, and those acceptable to him will revive from the dead and be glorified, and enter into the kingdom he will establish.

Those only will be acceptable to him who believe and obey the gospel. Hence, the sanest thing a man can do is to study his gospel, become acquainted with his commandments, and live in the hope and practice of both. In fact, this is the only sane course, for all other ways of seeking good (and what are men doing everywhere but seeking good?) end in miserable failure.

Thus is the invisible "stock" of spiritual things more valuable than the things which are seen; and as to its being "safe," the evidence is before the world. It has as real and sound a basis as any commercial scheme ever submitted to the Stock Exchange. People have no apprehension of the solid basis on which it rests; therefore, they cry, "Trash." Poor fools! Do they think themselves wiser than Paul, who said "I count all things *but dung* that I may win Christ!" He lived in the very age when the scheme was launched, and when he had far better opportunities of deciding whether it was worthy of confidence or not. They profess to admire Paul, but practically set him down for a fool. They pooh-pooh the language of his letters, which is the language of our spiritual exchange. They treat his most serious propositions as chimeras. His dissertations, such as that read this morning (Rom. 4), are meaningless jingle to them. How differently do the words of wisdom sound in the ears of those who understand them. Those phrases of Paul bring to such, glad tidings of great joy.

Let us look at some of the joyful thoughts represented. "Justification by faith": this tells us that "not by works that we have done, but by the favour of God," are we admitted to a saving relation. Had we been left to what we could do for ourselves, we must have perished, for no amendment of our ways is perfect; and even if it were, it could not release us from the natural inheritance of death, nor from the consequences of our own transgressions, even if there had been no natural inheritance. The kindness and love of God have come near through Christ, to offer forgiveness through faith in him on whom He laid the iniquities of us all. This is scriptural justification; not the imputation to us of acts of righteousness we never performed, as orthodox religion proclaims, but release from the consequences of the wrong we have done. That this is the right sense of justification is evident from Paul's quotation of David's words, in illustration of the blessedness of justification: "Blessed are they *whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered*. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord *will not impute sin*" (Rom. 4: 7-8). It is further evident from the association of the word "justification" with the process of absolution: "By him all that believe are *justified FROM ALL THINGS*, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13: 39); "Through this man is preached unto you the *forgiveness of sins*" (verse 38); "Repent, and be baptized . . . for the remission of your sins" (Acts 2: 38); "God was in Christ . . . *not imputing their trespasses unto them*" (2 Cor. 5: 19). Scriptural justification consists of a wiping-out of a sinful past; a giving to men a clear foundation, whereon to build the "works" which shall be unto life eternal. Justification does not ensure final salvation. A

SEASONS OF COMFORT

man may be "purged from his old sins," and forget himself (2 Pet. 1 : 9), and return like a washed sow to her wallowing in the mire (2 Pet. 2 : 22). In the justified state to which he is introduced on his obedience to the gospel, he may bring forth fruits of the flesh (Rom. 8 : 13), and not of the spirit, and of these he will reap—not life everlasting, but corruption (Gal. 6 : 8). Justification merely places him in a position where he may "work out his own salvation" (Phil. 2 : 12). This position is all of grace or favour. Without it, a man's exertions would be entirely in vain. In this respect, salvation is "not of works" : the basis of it is the bounty of God. Yet *in the position*, works will determine everything. We shall be judged "according to our works, good or bad" (2 Cor. 5 : 10 ; Matt. 16 : 27 ; Rev. 22 : 12).

The glory of justification is seen in contemplation of the unjustified man's position. Do what he may, he is debarred from life and joy to come. Nothing he can do can put him in probation for the kingdom. He may develop intellect to a high point ; he may cultivate the moral faculties to a noble excellence ; he may attain to great refinement of thought and manner ; he may surround himself with the accessories of affluence ; he may attain a world-wide reputation for talent, shrewdness, and philanthropy ; he may be in favour with admiring crowds on the platform, and make pleasant company for cultivated fellow-sinners at elegant and refined assemblies. So far as futurity goes it is all in vain. There is a worm at the root ; poison in the blood. He cannot extract it. He cannot avert the law of sin and death. The skull and cross-bones are his family crest. Into a coffin he must at last be nailed ; down among the worms he must at last be lowered ; to a piece of clay he shall turn, and worse than clay, a mass of corruption from which his warmest friends would recoil in horror. The way of God alone can justify. That way is revealed in Christ. If they will not hear Christ, corruption is their lot.

Be it ours, brethren and sisters, to keep fast hold of the wisdom which we have learnt from the word. Let us cast not away our confidence which hath great recompense of reward. Let us cling to the word, and let this be our guide unto death. Talk not of the standard being thus held too high. This (the book of God) is the standard. No man is safe to be listened to who holds the standard lower than this. Only the mind of Christ will avail as a standard in that shining day, when we shall stand in the heavenly presence, to hear what he thinks of us, and intends to do with us. The wicked world will have passed out of account. Wisdom only will sit in the judgment seat : our safety lies in making friends with Wisdom now. Hearken daily to her counsel ; wait at the posts of her doors. Partake of her feast of fat things. Let no man take your crown.

The Reign Of Law

“First pure, then peaceable.”—Purity must precede glorification.—No law, no transgression.—A short-sighted philosophy indeed.—Getting rid, not only of the consequences of breaking it, but of the excellent consequences of keeping it.—No good thing without law.—Gives a basis for the peaceful development of rational well-being.—Families where there is no law.—No finer spectacle on earth.—The consequences of introducing law.—“All the world guilty.”—His kindness.—Came to the rescue.—Upholding the law to the uttermost.—Christ died.—The uplifted serpent.—Condemned.—Yet saved by obedience.—God magnified.—Sinners justified.—A question which had need to be asked.—Wicked practices.—A good thing pushed too far destroys itself.—Baptized into death.—Dead unto sin.—Moral regeneration.—Knowledge of the gospel not enough.—Evidence of death before arrangements for burial.—Repentance before baptism.—Making the “calling and election sure.”—Continuing patiently in well-doing to the end.—What else is there of hope?—Terror as well as goodness.—No condemnation—to whom?—The intercession of Christ.—Christ the “arm of the Lord.”—Man weak, God strong.—Made sin for us, who knew no sin.

ROMANS 6.—“First pure, then peaceable” is a divine principle which has many illustrations. The world at large will only arrive at peace when it has been purified by the terrible doings of the Prince of Peace, who will be as a refiner’s fire and fullers’ soap, before he speaks peace to the people. The individual application of the principle is that which mostly concerns us at the present moment. Purity must precede glorification. It is written of the Holy City: “There shall not enter therein anything that defileth.” The list of excluded persons includes “drunkards, revilers, extortioners, fornicators, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind” (1 Cor. 6 : 9). Nothing is more incontrovertible in our most holy faith, than that righteousness of a high order is indispensable to secure approval at the hands of the Judge of the quick and dead. A continuance in sin in any form is fatal to our prospects in relation to that great day when every man will stand nakedly revealed in the presence of men and angels.

This is the lesson brought out in the chapter read, in which are certain collateral aspects of the question interesting to follow. In the fifth chapter Paul had said, “The law entered that sin might abound: but where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” This, at first sight, strange statement, yields some beautiful ideas when closely considered, as is the case with all scriptural things. Paul elsewhere says “I had not known sin but by the law.” This is true; for “sin is the transgression of the law,” and “where there is no law, there is no transgression.” A short-sighted philosophy says, “The more is the pity, then, that there ever was a law to trans-

SEASONS OF COMFORT

gress." "Away with the law," says this philosophy, "and we shall get rid of the sin and all its consequences." A short-sighted philosophy indeed! How would it do applied to common things? We see a criminal walked off to prison. If there were no law in England, he could not commit crime, for it is the breaking of the law that constitutes crime, and brings him into the clutches of the policeman. Shall we say, then, "Abolish the law that we may get rid of crime, and so save many a human being the pains and penalties resulting"? This would be the folly of those who, in their presumption, criticize God. No, no; in getting rid of the law, we should not only get rid of the consequences of breaking it, but of all the excellent consequences attending the keeping of it. We should get rid of security, and peace, and property, and life. There must be law. There can be no good without it. Existence itself springs from and continues by conformity to law. Without law, there would be chaos, confusion, and every evil thing. The lawless critics who would get rid of God, would be the first to bemoan their calamity if the sun took to rising at uncertain hours, and keeping away for uncertain days together. Suppose for a change, the condensing vapours of the atmosphere forgot to condense and deprived us of rain, or took to raining up instead of down? The creatures who consider not the operations of the Almighty hand would make a great outcry for the re-establishment of law, even if the rain is sometimes disagreeable and the sun hot. Stability of law in the physical and moral, gives a basis for the peaceful development of rational well-being; and it operates to this result by the very pain which its infraction causes. In a family where law is maintained, you have whipping and tears, but then you have also the sunshine after the rain—the beautiful spectacle of obedient, intelligent, cheerful children, whose society is not a nuisance. In families where there is no law, the children escape the rod, but they get something which is a thousand times worse—the misery of undeveloped minds and wilful, wicked dispositions, which repel sympathy, and lead at last into all sorrow. There is no finer spectacle on earth—it is the beauty of heaven itself—than complete and intelligent submission to law, the disobedience of which is known to bring evil consequences. Away from law, there is nothing but chaos and death. It is, therefore, a madman's criticism to find fault with the introduction of law because it leads to sin.

"The law entered that sin might abound," not for the sake of sin, but for the sake of what sin would give an opportunity of developing: for "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

We cannot doubt that God foresaw as a consequence of introducing law—first in Eden, then at Sinai—that "all the world would become guilty before Him," and, therefore, utterly lost, giving the opportunity for His kindness to come into play, with the result of drawing eternal gratitude and glory to Himself, and conferring unspeakable and appreciated benefit on such as should be redeemed. But does He show this kindness by dropping the law

out of sight, and doing the offenders good irrespective of its condemnation? By no means. This would have been worse than admitting man to life without law at all in the first instance. God came to the rescue on the principle of upholding the law to the uttermost. By His Son, He did what we could not do. In our nature, He fulfilled the law. The Son came for this purpose, "to do Thy will, O God." "Mere man" could not do it. "What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God (hath done) sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh." The Son said, "Think not that I come to destroy the law and the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil;" and fulfil them he did to the letter; and then what? *Died for those who had failed*—took upon himself the curse which the law imposed upon them. This God required at his hand: "to lay down his life for the sheep"; by this only, under His arrangement, could the sinning sheep live. The law was upheld. Christ died. "Through the Eternal Spirit he offered himself without spot unto God," and Christ was then raised and offered to sinners as a meeting point with God. Belief, acceptance and love of him, submission and obedience to him, are the conditions under which God is pleased to admit perishing sinners into relation with Himself. We look to the uplifted serpent and are saved from the serpent's bite. We believe in him as God's appointed sacrifice for sin, and as the fountain of every blessing covenanted in the promises to the fathers, and take upon us his name, and God extends forgiveness of past sins, and promise of life through Christ in the kingdom and age to come. The law is upheld: yet it is all of grace; we could not claim such a glorious arrangement. We were condemned. There is no room for boasting. Yet are we saved by obedience. The glorious result is achieved, that God is magnified as the source of all the benefit, while sinners are justified by believing; and with the answer of a good conscience, and the joy of immortality, ascribe all the glory to God—"for of Him, and to Him, and through Him are all things." But this point of glory could not have been reached without the law entering that sin might abound, that where sin abounded, grace might also much more abound.

Paul then introduces a question which needed to be asked in his day. There was a class who said that since the death of Christ had taken away sin, and his resurrection secured justification for those who believed, it was a matter of indifference how believers lived. Consequently they are said to have indulged in wicked practices while adhering to the faith of the gospel. John warns the brethren against this class. He says, "Little children, let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil" (1 John 3:7). "Whosoever," he says again, "is born of God doth not commit sin." "Shall we," says Paul, "continue in sin that grace may abound?" This question anticipates the possibility of someone turning upon him and saying, "If the entrance of sin has led to such glorious results, is it not a good thing for sin to continue?" "God forbid," is his answer. It is like everything else pushed too far: it destroys itself.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Grace would not abound with such a continuance in sin, but "indignation and wrath and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil" (Rom. 2 : 9). "If we sin wilfully after we receive the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10 : 26). Paul meets the question with another, which we do well to consider : "How shall we that are dead to sin continue any longer therein?" Here Paul brings baptism to bear in an important relation. "Know ye not that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were *baptized into his death*?" This, in the connection of the words, directs special attention to the purpose of the death in which we take symbolic part by baptism. "He died to take away our sins." If so, how shall we who have fellowshipped his death, continue the evil it was designed to remove? There is great logic in this argument. Having been buried with Christ in baptism, we are, so far as moral obligation goes, dead unto sin, that we should henceforth no longer live the rest of our time in the flesh, but to the will of God (1 Pet. 4 : 2). Dead unto sin, we are "alive unto righteousness." Hence, those who are truly born of God, sin not. They are men of holiness; men who adorn the doctrine of God in all things. Having been planted together in the likeness of his death, it is theirs to realize in their risen state, the likeness of his resurrection, "that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, they also might walk in newness of life." "Reckon ye yourselves," continues Paul, "to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto righteousness." "Let not sin reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." "Being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your *fruit unto holiness*, and the end everlasting life." Moral regeneration is therefore characteristic of all who shall be saved. "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord." Even as John the Baptist, when he came preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, called upon the people to "bring forth *fruits meet for repentance*." Without this, baptism is null and void. A knowledge of the gospel is not enough. There must be that love of all things to which it pertains, which will cause it to germinate like good seed in the mind, to the production of abundant fruit. If the knowledge of the truth fail to beget the new man in the heart of the sinner, the baptism following his knowledge is not a birth. It is a mere performance of no benefit to him, but rather to his condemnation.

It ought, therefore, to be seriously considered by all who contemplate that step, and by all who are called upon to assist them, whether there is evidence of death to sin before arrangements are made for burial. The burial of a living man is cruelty. It were better for the sinner to leave God's covenant alone than to make a mockery of it. Let him ponder well his state and his ways. "Let the sinner forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts," before he comes in this matter "to the Lord our God, who will abundantly pardon." Let him "repent," before he is baptized for the remission of sins. Then will he be received as a son with

blessing, and his days guided unto life eternal—that is, if his circumcision continue. In Christ he must grow and prosper, “ increasing in the knowledge of God,” “ always abounding in the work of the Lord.” He must not be a slothful servant. He must not go to sleep on rising from the watery grave to newness of life. He must not delude himself with the idea that now that his sins are forgiven, and his connection with Christ made sure, he has nothing more to do. A delusion of this sort will be fatal. His connection with Christ is made sure, but not his salvation. His connection with Christ will prove a terrible thing if he receive not Christ’s approval on the day of account. His salvation has to be “ wrought out with fear and trembling ” (Phil. 2 : 12), “ lest he come short of it ” (Heb. 4 : 1). He has to make his “ calling and election *sure* ” (2 Pet. 1 : 10). The justification of which he is the subject at his baptism does not ensure glorification. It but reinstates him in the position from which Adam fell. This was a position of probation, which, had Adam continued obedient, would have ended in eternal life. So in Christ, if we walk worthy of the position to which we are called, “ as obedient children, not fashioning ourselves according to the former lusts in our ignorance,” continuing patiently in well-doing to the end, we shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. A right understanding of the matter will, therefore, increase care on the part of those obeying the truth, instead of diminishing it. The danger is that we tire in the long silence and darkness of the night in which our lot is cast. This would be a great mistake. What else is there of hope? Naught besides. If we surrender this, darkness irretrievable is our inheritance; away from God, there is no redemption from the vanity of present existence. But there is more than deprivation to fear. There will be Divine wrath to encounter, and this in the mildest form is a fearful thing. It were better for us never to have known the way of life than to turn from the holy commandment after it has been delivered unto us (2 Pet. 2 : 21). “ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God ” (Heb. 10 : 31). There is terror as well as goodness connected with the Truth. The goodness of God leadeth us to repentance; but if we continue not in His goodness, it were better for us not to have been born.

There is no condemnation to them who are in Jesus Christ, *who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit*. There is condemnation to all others. All will be condemned who walk after the flesh, even though they be in Christ. The day that comes will be a day of judging every man according to his works, whether good or evil. Those who walk after the flesh will die (Rom. 8 : 13). They will reap corruption (Gal. 6 : 8). “ Tribulation, and wrath, and anguish will be on every soul of man that doeth evil . . . in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus ” (Rom. 2 : 9, 16). “ Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord,” says Paul, “ we persuade men.”

For such as walk humbly and do justly in the Lord, there is forgiveness for shortcomings and offences. The intercession of

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Christ is a great consolation for them. It is not available for those who walk in sin ; who live according to the course of this world, and whose affections are set on the things of the earth, instead of those things where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. "To this man" will God look, not to the man who loves the world and the things therein, and who has no response for the things that are of Christ ; but "to the broken and contrite in heart, who trembleth at His word." "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart ; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." Such has this great consolation that, though for the meantime subject to the bondage of hereditary mortality, "the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made him free from the law of sin and death," as will be made visible on the day when Christ shall proclaim all his sins forgiven, and change his vile body, and fashion it like unto his own glorious body. This will be to *the glory of his grace*, who hath made us accepted in the beloved. It will be all of God, for "what the law could not do in that it was weak *through the flesh*, that GOD [hath done] in sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, that for (or on account of) sin he might condemn sin in the flesh." Consider this, ye who say Christ was "a mere man." It is because "mere man" could not do the work, that Christ appeared—Emmanuel—God with us. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." The "*arm of the Lord*" has been outstretched in him to do what we mere men could not do. The law was holy, just, and good ; nay, it was "ordained unto life" (Rom. 7 : 10), but the weakness of "mere man" made it powerless. Being disobedient from the cradle, he found it unto death, for it cursed him if he diverged from it in any particular. But though man was weak, God was strong, and being (in Christ) "made flesh," he fulfilled the law and the prophets, and earned the triumph secured by resurrection. Dying and rising thus he constitutionally destroys the curse of the law. "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." He was made sin for us, who knew no sin. In his own body, he bore our sins on the tree. Thus was the law vindicated and God's way magnified, and man saved by faith in the slain Lamb of the passover. "O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God ! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out ! For who hath known the mind of the Lord ? or who hath been his counsellor ? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed to him again ? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things ; to whom be glory for ever. Amen." (Rom. 11 : 33-36).

The Household of Faith

The position of the household of faith in Paul's day.—The ministration of the Spirit.—Not an experience of our day.—An apostolic necessity.—Men appointed by the Spirit.—Authority to command.—We have not this advantage.—Qualification in apostolic days.—Qualifications of a bishop.—Deep principles underlie the truth.—Prominent brethren ought to be exemplary.—The world no guide as to righteousness.—Beauties of the cause of Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 12.—The position of the household of faith in Paul's day was very different from what it is in ours. We find many remarks and exhortations in his letters applicable in those days which have no bearing now. One of the principal differences is, that they were under the ministration of the Spirit, in the persons of qualified men. There were first apostles ; secondarily, prophets ; thirdly, pastors and teachers. There were helps, governments, men of divers gifts, bestowed by the power of the Spirit for the purpose of regulating the affairs of the communities just emerged from the practices of idolatry, and leading them on to the perfect work of the truth. The machinery at work is briefly described in these words—" Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit ; and there are differences of administration, but the same Lord ; and there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God who worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom ; to another the word of knowledge, by the same Spirit ; to another faith, by the same Spirit ; to another the gifts of healing, by the same Spirit." " Faith " in this passage is evidently the faith spoken of elsewhere as the faith that could remove mountains, and not the faith which cometh by hearing. We can see that such faith must be a gift of the Spirit, because it is only by the Spirit that miracles can be performed.

This is not a kind of experience that we know anything of in our day ; we have never seen any but perfectly natural manifestations. Ability in any particular branch is the result of natural endowment. It was different in those days ; for God confirmed the word of truth by miraculous manifestations. This is Paul's testimony, in these words, " How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him ; *God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit ?* " These gifts of the Spirit were signs or tokens that the testimony of the apostles was of God. It was highly necessary that such gifts should be given ; for how otherwise could men have received the doctrine of the apostles ? The men placed over the ecclesias were men qualified by the Spirit and *appointed by the Spirit*. This appears in Paul's address to the elders of Ephesus : " Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, *over which the Holy Spirit hath made*

SEASONS OF COMFORT

you overseers, to feed the Church of God." This placed them in a very different position from what we occupy, and necessarily gave them a power to rule, to which no one now can make pretension. A divinely-appointed man had authority to command, and a voice that would be listened to. We have not this advantage, and it is a mistake in our present circumstances to act as if we had. We have no authority ; we have no power to do anything but to preach the word, and restrict ourselves to the company of those who submit to it. These facts do not involve the exercise of authority ; but merely of the private prerogative, which appertains to every man, to choose individually what appears to him to be the right course to pursue. All that is done now is voluntary, and according to natural qualification. To a certain extent this rule was observed in apostolic days. The men selected by the Spirit were men of certain previous qualification.

Paul says, " If a man desire the office of a bishop (overseer), he desireth a good work." To desire the office of a bishop, was to desire to have to do with the highest thing it was possible to put a hand to. But Paul guards the way against its usurpation by men who might merely be enamoured of power. He specifies the qualifications with distinctness. " A bishop must be blameless ; the husband of one wife "—a very necessary matter to mention in those days, when polygamy was rife ; " vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach ; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre ; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous ; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God ?) ; not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." These were the qualifications which in the estimation of Paul were necessary before a man could efficiently fill a position of authority in the ecclesia. And although these remarks have no direct bearing upon our time, they indicate principles which we can apply in our circumstances. We have no men who have been nominated or equipped by the Spirit to rule in the sense of being masters ; but we must have certain brethren for the performance of certain duties, and in the selecting of these, it is well to keep these qualifications in view.

Then we should do well to take a wider view, and to recognize the principles laid down with regard to bishops, as holding good with regard to every brother of Christ. We must adorn the truth, we must be free from reproach ; for what is our position ? We are witnesses for God against the wickedness of men—not witnesses for doctrinal truth merely. The truth in this sense is the outside thing, the external shape of the eternal principles of God. There is a principle underlying the purpose of God to set up a kingdom. There is a deep reason for our mortality, which we may overlook in our eagerness to demonstrate our mortality. There are glorious principles at work underneath the scheme of salvation. We have to show the channel through which the principles are brought ;

but it would be infatuation to overlook the principles themselves. The love of God, His righteousness, His greatness, His holiness, His authority, our dependence on Him, are essential principles of the truth. While, then, we are witnesses against the impiety and unrighteousness of men, let us see to it that we ourselves are holy and without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. This is the more necessary in proportion as a brother is able to take an active part in the upholding of the testimony. There are necessarily those in the ecclesias who take a more prominent part than others, and there always will be ; the work cannot do itself. Where there are none to take it up, the work goes to the wall, and the truth languishes. Therefore, it behoves presiding brethren—and I mention them because they are seen more conspicuously in connection with Christ's business—to be particularly exemplary and free from blemish and reproach in all things. They ought to be zealous and punctual in their attendance at the meetings ; moreover, they ought to be men of example at home. If a man will not bear examination at home, he is not worth anything abroad, whatever he may appear to be in a public capacity. There must be the gold underneath—not on the surface only ; they must be men of integrity and scrupulous honour in everything. It is for them to uphold what is honourable, and to reprobate and avoid everything that is dishonourable. They must not look to the world for their lessons : the world is a liar in this matter. There are many things the world calls white that are black ; and the things that are thoroughly white in the sight of God, they oftentimes call black and foolish. They must be guided by Christ's sentiments in this matter—prominent servants of Christ. For this purpose they must be students of the word. They ought to set an example to all the rest in this as well as other matters ; they ought to read continually themselves, and be filled richly with the word of Christ, and not follow a course whose example it would be dangerous to imitate. Not that a greater responsibility rests upon them than the rest : it behoves every man and woman, who has put on the name of Christ, to depart from iniquity and follow after righteousness ; for it is certain that all others will be excluded from the kingdom of God. Responsibility attaches to all alike—public or private ; but it applies with peculiar force to all who stand before the world to promote the cause of holiness. The cause of Christ is the cause of honour, of love, of integrity, of justice, of goodness and all excellence. It is the cause of everything that is morally beautiful, and pure-minded, and noble and lofty ; and to these things we have to rise. We must attain them, or be left in the valley of death.

Patience And Its Work

Patient continuance in well-doing.—A difficult attitude.—God's rule in all cases.—Abraham.—Waiting 100 years.—Isaac and Jacob similarly tried.—David an illustration of the same thing.—Dreary times for David.—Jesus, the greatest example of suffering affliction and patience.—Behold him!—The burden grievous to be borne.—Glory purchased with suffering.—Paul a pattern to them which should hereafter believe.—The experience bitter to Paul.—Those who have gone before.—Few of us ever be put to so great a strait.—Our sufferings not less serviceable.—God permits suffering to His chosen.—God changeth not.—Not tempted above that we are able to bear.—Redeeming the time.

A "PATIENT continuance in well-doing" is well-pleasing to God, and will secure the blessing at last, even life for evermore (Rom. 2 : 7). But like all courses that lead to good results, it is a course that is difficult, and implies something to endure. There were no need for patience if all were sweet and refreshing; but there is need for patience, as all can testify who have laid hold of the hope set before us in the gospel. All is not sweet and refreshing, but much, and almost everything, the other way. We are in a dry and thirsty land, wherein there is but an occasional streamlet (and that almost dry in its bed) to strengthen the weary traveller by the way. It is written, "It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord." Doubtless it is good, but still trying, and perhaps good because trying. Our faith and patience are exercised in the attitude of waiting, and exercise of this kind gives spiritual strength and hardihood. "Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience, and experience hope" (Rom. 5 : 4). "We are saved by hope : but hope that is seen is not hope . . . but if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8 : 24). We "wait for the Son of God from heaven" (1 Thess. 1 : 10). We are "looking for that blessed hope" (Titus 2 : 13) and our looking and waiting and hoping prepare us for taking part in the joy of those who are to say in that day, "Lo, this is our God : we have waited for him . . . we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation" (Isa. 25 : 9).

It is well to recognize this feature of our calling that we "be not weary in well doing." True it is that "hope deferred maketh the heart sick" ; but if we recognize the fact that a certain deferring of hope is part of our trial appointed of God, we shall be enabled to "endure as seeing him who is invisible." If we look back, we shall see that the same affliction was accomplished in all of whom God's approval is recorded. In no case is it more strikingly exemplified than in the case of the man who is called "the friend of God," and who occupies the honourable position of father of the family whom God is begetting for Himself from among the sons of men. Abraham was called to leave the land of his nativity, and go to a country of

which he was ignorant, with apparently no practical object. Obeying the command, he came to the land of Canaan, and sojourned among the children of the land as a stranger. His sojourn was long and trying. He was promised the land for inheritance, jointly with his seed, but had no information as to the time to which the promise referred, nor any indication for many years that he was to have seed. To the people of the land he must have appeared mad—a harmless neighbour enough, but indulging in the strange and unlikely fancy, that one day the whole country would be his, and that he would possess it jointly with a family as the stars of the sky for multitude. Abraham had a hundred years of this trial of patient waiting, and was then gathered to his fathers, “not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off” (Heb. 11 : 13). He must have had a dreary time of it, as all the people of God have had since his day. He had none of the historic landmarks which we possess, by which we are enabled to see a great part of the divine programme accomplished, and almost to feel the motion of the machinery which is hurrying on to the appointed consummation. True, he had the advantage of personal intercourse, at intervals, with the Elohim, which would no doubt make up for a good deal. Still, it did not take the weariness from delay. In one sense, it would aggravate it, since the visible reality of the promise and the personages who had to do with the communication of it, would be apt to inspire him with the desire for immediate realization, and corresponding impatience with unexplained delay.

Isaac and Jacob, “the heirs with him of the same promise,” were similarly tried and similarly endured till they “fell on sleep and saw corruption.” Joseph was put sorely to the proof before he saw the light. He had but little inducement as a slave to keep God in his remembrance, and make His will the law of his life. Yet was he steadfast for dark years of adversity, and, at last, sat on the throne as the light of his Father’s house. David is an illustration of the same thing. He was anointed to be king of Israel without intimation that he would first be an outcast, whose life would be hunted with the whole power of the kingdom. The bitterness came upon him unexpectedly and made him despondent. Said he, “I will one day perish by the hand of Saul.” They must have been dreary times for David when hiding in the dens and caves of the earth, afraid to show himself to civilized man for fear of his life. The keenness of his mental sufferings is reflected in many of the psalms written during that time, which, though prophetic of the Messiah, were, primarily, the breathings of the afflicted spirit of David, of whom the Spirit made use to foreshadow the experience of his greater Son—the Root and offspring of David—who, before exaltation, was to be a “man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” This at once leads us to Jesus, the greatest example of suffering affliction, and patience. In all things he was tempted like to his brethren, yet without sin. He illustrates to us, as no case does, that God appoints dreary times for His people to pass through, before He lifts upon them the unveiled light of His countenance.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Behold him ! Was ever sorrow like unto his sorrow ? He came to his own people with heart full of the pity of God who was enshrined in him. He looked on them with tears in his eyes, and bewailed the infatuation that resisted all divine entreaty. He sought to bless and do them good, in turning every one of them from their iniquities. But they hid their faces from him. They despised and rejected him. They gave him to insult and death. They esteemed him smitten of God and afflicted, little knowing that he was wounded for their transgressions, that he was bruised for their iniquity. The burden was too grievous to be borne. It broke the heart and whelmed the sufferer in death. Ah, thou Man of Sorrows, whose cry of agony rings down to this dark century of sin, and opens anew the fountain of thy grief in the hearts of such as love thee, thou shalt yet see of the travail of thy soul and shalt be satisfied ! A seed shall arise from the dust of the earth, who shall praise thy glorious name, when, surrounding thee in the day of thine exaltation, they shall sing, " Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb . . . Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation ; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests : and we shall reign on the earth."

Even now is the Lord exalted with a name above every name. But the glory was purchased with suffering—not merely the death on the cross, but the dreariness of his sojourn among men, who were indifferent, hardhearted, and rebellious. Even his disciples, with all their loyalty, were children in understanding, and no companions to him who dwelt in the bosom of the Father. Let us look, then, unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is now set down at the right hand of God ; and we shall be greatly nerved to an endurance of the little dreariness incident to our profession.

Then, take Paul, who expressly says that he obtained mercy " that in me first Jesus Christ might *show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern* to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting " (1 Tim. 1 : 16). He had forty years of no ordinary conflict. In labours more abundant than the rest of the apostles, he had a greater share of the privations in those times incident to the preaching of the word. In travels more extended and perilous, he was in prisons more frequent, in stripes oft, in social degradation more complete. He was counted a low character—a pestilent fellow with both Jew and Gentile—the offscouring of all things, having lost reputation, social standing, and wealth. The recital may read picturesquely. It may please the fancy to contemplate so heroic a sacrifice, but the experience itself was bitter to Paul. He did not endure his troubles so easily as we read about them, or as the fancy may paint. He was a perishing mortal like ourselves, and his weak nature often sank under the rigour of his course. He speaks of being " pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that he despaired even of life " (2 Cor. 1 : 8) ; and of being " in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst,

in fastings often, in cold and nakedness." Such expressions show the stern reality of the experience through which he had to struggle in his pilgrimage to life eternal. They show that those words of his, already quoted, are no vain words, wherein he says that in him, by Christ, was set forth a pattern of long-suffering for the benefit of subsequent believers. His warfare was arduous, his sufferings keen ; his endurance great ; his patience wonderful. These features of his case are commended to our consideration. They are intended by Christ for our profit ; and profitable they are, if we let our mind rest on them.

It is some comfort in our troubled experience, to think that those who have gone before had their turn, and a sharp turn too. We cannot suffer more than they did. Few of us will ever be put to so great a strait ; and if they could say " Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," where is our courage if we faint by the way ? Our sufferings, though lighter, need not be less serviceable. They may always tend to the same result of fixing the desire and hope on the things that are not seen ; for " the things which are seen," even in their most prosperous form, " are temporal " ; but the things that are not seen (as yet) " are eternal." Therefore " though the outward man perish," which he will do, work or wait, " our inward man—the new mental man created within by the truth—is renewed day by day." Our brethren in the first century fortified themselves by the reflection that " the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us ; " and shall we look at them with a different eye who are seeking to follow in their footsteps ? God permits suffering to His chosen for this very purpose, " that the trial of their faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory, at the appearing of Christ " (1 Pet. 1 : 7). He puts his children in the furnace to try them, as gold, that the dross may be consumed. No character is complete till it is tried.

A man or a woman is worth little as a companion, either for wisdom or sympathy, who has not seen trouble. Those believers, " living in pleasure, are dead while they live." Having a name to live, they are dead ; they are not awake to the great and dread realities of existence that are in God. If God love, he will draw them into the furnace in some way. This is the word of Christ to the seven churches. " As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten " (Rev. 3 : 19). Again, " Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons ; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not ? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons " (Heb. 12 : 6-8). It cannot be that this principle should apply to the sons of God in the first century, and not apply now. God changeth not ; and if we are His, we are as much the objects of His care as His children were in the beginning. Therefore when we suffer according to the

will of God, let us commit ourselves unto Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator (1 Pet. 4 : 19). We have Paul's assurance that He will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear, but will with the temptation make a way of escape.

The dullness of the time, the weariness of delay, the triumph of ungodliness, the uprise of affliction in our affairs, we may accept as the angels of Him who, through much tribulation, is purifying to himself a people who, with prepared and chastened hearts, will in the day of His glory "come with singing unto Zion, and everlasting joy upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away." Only let us give diligent heed to the things we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip; lest any man fail of the grace of God, and come short of the promise which has been left for those who believe and are faithful to the end. As newborn babes, let us desire the sincere milk of the word (in the daily reading thereof) that we may grow thereby; continuing instant in prayer, and making melody in our hearts to the Lord, in the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; redeeming the time, knowing that the days are evil; "being steadfast and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know that our labour is not in vain in the Lord."

The Dead In Christ

A sister in her grave.—The dead in Christ.—Their next conscious moment.—Life is but a vapour.—Large aims for present advantage deaden the heart.—Danger great, because insidious.—The force of the apostolic precepts.—By the side of the coffin.—In the common circumstances of every-day life.—A sorrowful situation altogether.—Men without God.—Wretched, poor, unfed, unclad, uneducated.—A man of godly aspiration sad.—Mirth misplaced in the present state of things.—The house of mourning helpful to wisdom.—Things entirely changed.—The coming of the Lord.—An end to all sorrow and all curse.—The comfort we need.—The appearance of the resurrected.—The day of the Lord.—What it has in store.—Darkness and not light for some.—Against Israel.—Forms of godliness.—An abomination.—Why? its lesson.—Leading men abandoned to pleasures.—No part in the universal race.—Danger of being infected with the all-prevalent Laodicean spirit.—Anguish of rejection from the Lord's presence.

THE words read in the ordinary course this morning from 1 Thess. are words of comfort. They are very appropriate to our case this morning, for we have need of comfort. We have lost a sister whose society was a help in Christ in the dreary path of pilgrimage we are treading to the kingdom of God. The loss has come upon us very suddenly. She was with us at the breaking of bread last Sunday

morning, and this morning she is in her grave where we laid her last Friday.

We cannot help being powerfully exercised by such an event. Sorrow is the uppermost feeling for the moment. The sorrow, however, I think, is for ourselves. We have no cause to sorrow for the dead in Christ. They are at rest. For them, the interval of this dark and trying probation exists no more. Waiting for the kingdom is over with them. Their next conscious moment will introduce them to the great fact of Christ having returned, to which they looked as their star of hope during their passage through "time's dark wilderness of years," and that next conscious moment will appear to them immediately consecutive to the last thought they had before closing their eyes in death. For the dead we sorrow not. In a sense, they are to be envied. It is for ourselves we sorrow; we are left behind. We are still in the darkness of night, struggling along our difficult pilgrimage with one less to cheer and comfort us on the road.

Out of this self-sorrow comes a lesson—a lesson always needed though denied by none. We hold life by a very slender thread. Our life is but a vapour that appeareth for a very little time and then vanisheth away. We never know who will go next. Who would have supposed that our sister would be the next to be called from our side—from the very midst of her earnest watching for the appearing of the Lord—to join the band of those who sleep in Jesus? If we had been asked to choose the next most likely to die, we should have made our selection from several others: we certainly should not have included her. Well, as she has thus suddenly disappeared from our midst, between one Sunday and another, so may any one of us.

If so, where is the wisdom of so much care for the present life? Where is the wisdom of large aims for present advantage? When death overtakes us the care is at an end, and the advantages exist no longer for us: and meanwhile, the care may have killed us; the riches, and the pleasures, destroyed our prospects in Christ, in having deadened the heart and interfered with a good account for the judgment seat. The danger in this respect is very great because very insidious, being associated with so much that is legitimate. We are apt to pass from the bounds of what is right and safe to that which is unwise and deadly before we are aware. The cares and pleasures of life find a powerful response in the instincts of the natural man, which are strong with us all, at the beginning of the race at all events. We have to be on our guard.

A look at a dead friend is a help to this attitude of circumspection. We realize what is wisdom for them, at all events. We think how bootless their anxiety, of say a week before, has been: how well they might have spared themselves the load of their cares; how perfectly wise was their zealous addiction to the works of Christ, which alone remain their property in the eternal prospect. A reasonable mind will transfer these views from the dead to the living; from a dead brother or sister to one's own still living—but perhaps to be soon dead—self. Such a mind will see and feel and surrender

SEASONS OF COMFORT

to the force of the apostolic precepts. Be without carefulness ; cast your care upon God, who careth for you. Have faith in God. Having food and raiment, be therewith content. Labour not to be rich. Mind not high things. Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear. Live soberly, righteously, and godly. Be diligent to every good work. Seek first the kingdom of God. Be counted with the despised. Be like Moses, who refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.

By the side of the coffin, these exhortations of the Spirit have great force : yet to be of benefit they must obtain the mastery over us in the common circumstances of every-day life, leading us to walk as saints, " holy in all manner of conversation," purified unto Christ a peculiar people, zealous of good works, not fashioning ourselves according to the former lusts in our ignorance, but walking in the light, that we may be the children of the light, thus made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. Most people feel solemnized in the presence of death : but most people also go away and forget the lessons that speak to them in that solemnity. Nay, most people are glad to get away, and glad to forget, glad to rejoin the careless throng, glad to efface the sombreness in the occupations of pleasure, or in the laughter of the fool, that crackles like thorns under the pot. In this lies the difference between a wise man and a fool : " The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning ; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools " (Eccl. 7 : 4). Is it that the wise have a liking for that which is sombre ? Is it that they have no capacity for the cheery aspect of things ? By no means. There is a reason. Mourning is not a preference, but a result. The whole present situation of things will, of its own force, cause sorrow in every mind that perceives it. Only those who are blind or insensible can be unaffected by such a sorrowful situation. Folly is in the ascendant ; death reigns ; God is a stranger among the teeming multitudes. He who made the earth, is disowned in it. He hath spoken good words of promise and healing words of invitation ; yet His word is spurned, and men rush everywhere after mere amusement without God. This would all be sad enough even if everybody had plenty, and there were no wretched poor huddled away in garrets, unfed, unclad, uneducated, uncared for, unblessed in a single opportunity of improvement or a single hope of release from evil plight ; but when in addition to the pleasures, there is the misery ; when in addition to the folly, there is the rotting poverty and hopeless degradation of millions ; when, in addition to the wickedness, there is the blight, the stunting, the afflicting, the blasting, the crushing, the destruction of the overwhelming bulk of mankind, at the hands of a small section of monopolists, who surfeit themselves with measureless plenty, and philosophically contemplate the wretchedness without through the roseate atmosphere of their surroundings, venturing even to think the system right and the

arrangement respectable—I say when a man of godly aspiration realizes this situation of things, he needs not to make any effort at sadness. He is sad because there is a reason for it. He cannot share in the sport of fools with whom there is no recognition of the facts of the case. If he avoids the house of mirth, it is because mirth is misplaced in the present state of things on earth. There is mirth by and by for the righteous, but not yet. The business of salvation is too precarious a thing to allow it. When the *London* was slowly foundering in the Bay of Biscay, a tipsy sailor exerted himself to get possession of some valuables which a passenger (bent on trying to save his life) had thrown away among some chains coiled on the deck, and already under water. The sailor was in vain entreated to leave the trinkets alone and look after his life. Drink had interfered with a true perception of his surroundings, and he went to the bottom in his mad attempt. His case is a fair illustration of the case of the man who imperils his immortality by present pleasures and pre-occupations. The ship is foundering with us all ; and the chief business is to save ourselves from this untoward generation ; a business which involves the avoidance of many things which a man merely bent on entertainment might think proper to engage in, and the doing of many things which such a man would think unnecessary. Paul defines this important business and its co-relevants in the well-known words : “ Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and run with patience the race that is set before us. . . . We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we let them slip.” Jesus expresses the same idea parabolically, when he says : “ If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off. It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed than having two hands to be cast into the fire of Gehenna.”

Because the house of mourning is helpful to all these lessons of wisdom, therefore, it is written, “ It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting : for that is the end of all living, and the living will lay it to his heart.” But the day will come when this relation of things will be entirely changed. The day will come when the house of mourning will be abolished, and when gladness and good cheer and true pleasure will be the portion and everlasting joy of the chosen of God. This is the day exhibited to view in the words of Paul before us in 1 Thess. 4 : 13-18. It is the day of the coming of the Lord, whose mission it is at last to put an end to all sorrow and all curse. “ The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first : then we which are alive and remain shall be caught away together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” And well we may. It is the comfort we need. It is a comfort exactly suited to our case. We shall see our sleeping friends in Christ again. They lose nothing by going to sleep. They awake from their deep slumber before the living are removed. Their resurrection is the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

first sign of the Lord's return ; for the living go with them in company to meet him. They are caught away together. Therefore they must come together first ; from which it follows—the time of the end having arrived—fanatical as the expectation may appear to those who have not realized the grounds of truth on which it rests—that we may be at any time visited by friends whom we have laid in the grave. This re-appearance will not alarm those who are looking for it with a rational expectation. It is simply a question of restoring the combinations of elements and impressions that made them before. They will be the same persons we knew before. We were not frightened by them then : there will be no more reason to be frightened by them now, when they present themselves in flesh and blood as we knew them. Fright in such things belongs to ghostology—not to the glorious gospel of the blessed God.

There will only be one element of fear in the occurrence. The appearance of the resurrected will mean that the day of the Lord has arrived. If we are terrified at the day of the Lord, then may we be terrified at the re-appearance of the dead, but not otherwise. Those who are living as the Lord's servants need not be afraid of the advent of that day. Other sorts, doubtless, have cause for fear, even though they may be looking for the day of the Lord. This we learn from the words read from Amos—strange words at first sight : “ Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord ! ” (Amos 5 : 18). Why should there be woe to any who desire the day of the Lord? Because of what it has in store for them if they are not in harmony with it. “ To what end is it *for you* ? ” continues the prophet. “ The day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him ”—that is, an unworthy man desiring release from the evils of this afflicted state will find the day of the Lord the opposite of a release—a worse form of evil—“ weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth ”—“ or as if a man went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him ”—that is, such a man seeking rest in the kingdom of God, finds its arrival to be the advent of the destroyer : “ Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light ? even very dark, and no brightness in it ? ”

Against whom are such terrible words directed ? Is it against idolaters, or infidels, or heathen profligates ? No ! It was against Israel who complied with the forms of godliness and rendered an external obedience, as appears from the prophet's continuing speech. “ I hate,” saith God, “ I despise your *feast days*, and I will not smell in your *solemn assemblies*. Though ye offer me *burnt offerings* and your *meat offerings*, I will not accept them, neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of *thy songs* ; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols.” It was a people offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, holding solemn assemblies, and singing solemn songs, that were to find the day of the Lord darkness and not light. How is this ? These things were ordained in the law. These services were required by divine appointment : and yet here is a people complying with these divine require-

ments assured of their rejection. Here are ordinances of divine appointment declared an abomination.

Why present this discouraging picture? Because of its lesson. These things were written for our instruction. So Paul declares. And is not the lesson obvious? We desire the day of the Lord, and watch for the signs of the times. We hold solemn assemblies at the breaking of bread, and unite in the songs of God. If Israel did all these things and were rejected, have we any reason for confidence, if our righteousness exceed not the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees?

Why were their services unacceptable? The answer is evident from the words that come next after those last quoted: "Let judgment run down like waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream." This implies that the contrary state of things prevailed, as described by Isaiah. "Judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off, for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth, and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey."

Here is the next feature: instead of being grieved at such a state of things—instead of being zealous for righteousness in the earth, the leading men of Israel abandoned themselves to pleasures, and lost in the luxuries of wealth all sensibility to the calamities surrounding them. Their attitude is thus stated and condemned in the next chapter of Amos: "They lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock; and the calves out of the midst of the stall. They chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David. They drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: *but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.*"

What other lesson is to be extracted from this divine picture, than that which Jesus Himself gives us in Luke 6:24: "Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep"; and again by James (5:1, 5): "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. . . . Ye have lived in pleasure, and been wanton. Ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter." We have no rich men among us, or next to none. Therefore, the lesson in this form has, perhaps, no special applicability to us; but it is valuable as showing that we must take no part in the universal race after pleasure and riches, if we desire to make our calling and election sure; and it is further valuable as showing that all our meetings, and our labours and our watchings, must be sanctified with the spirit of holy and enlightened zeal for God, and entire consecration to His obedience, before they will be of any advantage to us. Both these lessons are distinct and palpable in their nature and of urgent suitability in our situation. We are in danger of being infected with the all-prevalent Laodicean spirit around us. We are in danger of sickening and dying in the pestilential atmosphere of public opinion. We are in danger of rejecting

the spirit of the holy oracles, because it is not common to receive it. We are in danger of sinking into that state in which our very compliances with divine requirements, so far as form goes, in meeting and breaking bread, and singing and praying, and contending for the faith, are so many mere performances odious to God ; and our desire for the day of the Lord a sentiment destined to be quenched in the anguish of rejection from the Lord's presence at his coming. The danger will continue to the last moment, and therefore, till then the warning must be sounded, " exhorting one another daily, and so much the more as we see the day approaching."

An Oracle of Wrath

Lessons that do not lose their force.—Defunct cities and peoples.—The living illustration of divine wisdom.—The oracle of wrath against Israel.—Modern times.—The mood expressed by the word Deism.—Natural bias and easy-going theories.—Indignant repudiation at the hands of the Eternal.—God attentively regards what is passing in the earth.—Will finally do good to those who please Him.—The Gentiles.—A divine view of human ways.—A crime that a man or a nation should be proud.—God allows them meanwhile.—The lofty looks of man shall be humbled.—Perfect reasonableness of all this.—Boastful communities.—Britain.—Nineveh in the days of her power.—Three thousand years after.—Popular self-laudation and braggadocio.—All of the flesh.—Patriotism and perdition.—Strangers and pilgrims.—The day of trial.—The day of light and liberty.

THE prophetic oracle (Zeph. 2) read in our hearing is fraught with lessons that do not lose their force with the flight of time, but become, on the contrary, the more needful as we prolong our stay in an evil world, like that in which we dwell. Continuing contact with the world, we all know, is liable to have the opposite effect from that desired by Paul when he said : " Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind " (Rom. 12 : 2). At first when we become acquainted with the truth, the power of a new and enthusiastic ideal may keep us separate from the spirit and principles of the world ; but as time goes on and the friction of life becomes more trying, and the resources of perishing human nature fail, that ideal is apt to lose power unless nourished and cherished by that daily renewal of our acquaintance with the divine ways and thoughts which God has provided for us in the oracles of His truth.

The particular portion of the Word before us this morning relates to defunct cities and peoples. It is none the less our property, however, for that. These things were written, not for the sake

only of the places and persons primarily affected. Even the incidents that transpired so long ago as the Exodus of Israel to the promised land under Moses, were written, Paul says, "for our admonition" (1 Cor. 10 : 11). In this sense, the Scriptures generally—all the Scriptures—are "profitable for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3 : 17). It is a very unenlightened view that regards them as a historical record merely as a literary monument of antiquity. This unenlightened view we have perhaps all shared, more or less, one time or other, in the days of our ignorance. Emancipated by the truth, we are enabled to recognize in them the living illustration and interpretation of divine wisdom, of which their historical form is but the effective vehicle.

The oracle before us is one of wrath, first against Israel, then against the Philistines, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria. The reason of the wrath is that which mostly concerns us. In the case of Israel, it is directed against "*the men that are settled on their lees; that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.*" This class are said in Malachi (2 : 17) to have "wearied the Lord with their words," in saying, "Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord," and, "Where is the God of judgment?" Isaiah (5 : 19) represents them as saying, "Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it : and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it." In these delineations, it is not difficult to recognize a form of sentiment by no means uncommon in modern times. Men "settled on their lees," well to do and comfortable in the surroundings which they have chosen, easily slip into the mood which is expressed in our day by the word Deism. They practically come to believe that there is no God. The Deity, according to their comfortable thoughts, is indifferent ; creation is a huge machine which He works mechanically upon certain fixed principles, without any discrimination of individuals or individual action. They think He takes no concern and probably has no knowledge of the ways of men, good or evil ; that He leaves all things in general to work themselves out by a series of blind chemical adjustments in which the idea of Jehovah meting out good and evil and taking pleasure in one class and not in another, is excluded. This is the impression made by nature, which as the platform of operations, is, doubtless, constructed upon the principle of fixed relation of forces, and men in general have a bias in favour of the notion that unsupplemented nature seems to favour, and are pleased to think that God takes no interest and exercises no control in the domain of human life. In prosperity this notion, favoured by natural bias, is liable to obtain the ascendancy, and to find expression in easy-going theories that minister to the comfort of healthy people in good circumstances.

Such theories receive indignant repudiation at the hands of the Eternal Possessor of heaven and earth. Speaking by the prophets, He declares that the rich among His own nation wearied Him with their foolish sentiments on the subject ; and His weariness, reaching

at last the end of endurance, found terrible vent in destroying judgment described in the following language : " Therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation . . . I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord : and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath." " That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness."

What God regarded with displeasure then, we may be quite sure is no less displeasing to Him now, for He is unchangeable. He has revealed that however much appearances may teach the contrary, He attentively regards what is passing in the earth ; that He taketh pleasure in those who fear His name and is angry with the wicked every day ; and that, in due time, He will cause every responsible man to find according to His ways. Contrary as it may be to the philosophy of human brains, *alias* sinful flesh, He will finally do good to those who please Him by their affectionate interest in His ways and obedience to His commandments, and inflict unspeakable evil on those who regard Him not and presumptuously set at nought His appointments. Narrow-minded as it may seem to the philosophers, evildoers are objects of aversion to the Eternal Father of all ; and the impunity they now enjoy is only the result first of the divine patience, and, secondly, of the fact that God hath appointed a time, not yet arrived, for judging the righteous and the wicked. No rational mind will, therefore, be guilty of the scoffing enquiry that wearied Jehovah in Israel, " Where is the God of judgment ? " Rather will he solemnly ponder the words of wisdom by Solomon : " Though a sinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him : but it shall not be well with the wicked . . . For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."

As regards the Gentiles inveighed against in the portion of scripture read, their crime was of a different order, but one also common in our day. After describing the evils that would come upon them, the prophet says : " This shall they have for *their pride*, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of the Lord of hosts. The Lord will be terrible unto them : for he will famish all the gods (or rulers) of the earth ; and (as the final result) men shall worship him, everyone from his place, even all the isles of the heathen." It is interesting to recollect that in these oracles of truth we have a divine view of human ways : a picture of the situation of things among men as they appear to God's eyes. It is here where their value lies. As the children of God—constituted such by the obedience of the gospel—it is of the first importance that we should use all diligence to obtain and cherish such an insight. In fact the possession of it is the one thing that distinguishes the children of God from the children of the devil. Human literature

reflects human views of the situation, and the student of this literature gets only the human view. We have to go to the Scriptures to get the divine view, and this view is in complete contrast to that which is popular with society in general. As Jesus says, "That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God."

The point is illustrated in the statement before us. Who among men in general would make it a crime that a man or a nation should be proud? and that they should reproach the people of the Lord of Hosts? Why, this is the characteristic of all polite society in our day. They are proud—oh, so proud!—and it is considered one of the cardinal points of a true civilization to have and to cultivate pride. As for divine things and divine people, whether you understand the Jews nationally, or the poor who are rich in faith, there is no richer theme of jest among them. The characters of Scripture and their imitators among the living alike come in for their mirth, and they are not considered to sin very grievously in having their joke on such topics. Yet scripturally viewed, they are "sinners before the Lord exceedingly," and have need to tremble in the presence of the patient Creator of Heaven and Earth. Their pride and their scorning will evoke the appointed visitation in due time. It is written, "The Lord of Hosts hath purposed it, to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth": and though His anger is held back against the appointed time, and men in their temerity make defiant use of the liberty God allows them meanwhile, the hour will arrive when the truth of His word will become manifest in the tempest that will strike confusion and terror into the hearts of His enemies, and bring their power in ruins to the earth. "The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Isa. 2 : 11). The perfect reasonableness of all this will be manifest to those who realize that man is a creature only permitted to live by the power of the Creator, and that no ground of pride or glory exists in the possession of privileges. Even the angels, "greater in power and might," vaunt not themselves, but veil themselves in the presence of the terrible Majesty and power of the Eternal Self-existence filling heaven and earth, from whom they have derived their glorious attributes. How odious and unreasonable then, are the pomposities and insubordinations of "dust and ashes." Even human reason rightly applied can see this: how much more hateful must it be in the eyes of the Eternal, from whom nothing in heaven and earth is hid? How hateful it is we may learn from the silent and dreary desolation that prevails where once flourished the busy, prosperous, and boastful communities of Phenicia, Moab, Ammon, Idumea, etc., against whom Jehovah's anger was declared.

And if hateful then, is it offensive now? Can we walk through the streets of the great towns that thrive in Britain without realizing that the anger of God has equal cause to burn as in the days of old? This is an important question, for it bears upon a scriptural estimate of the ways of the world, and helps us rightly to shape our course

SEASONS OF COMFORT

as those who seek to walk as children of the light. Let us look at Nineveh, which is mentioned among the other objects of the divine displeasure. In the days of the prophet, she was a great city. She was not only the seat of military empire, but she was the centre of a thriving commerce. We learn this, not only in the declaration of Nahum (3 : 16), that she had "multiplied her merchants above the stars of heaven," but from the testimony of certain clay-burnt tablets just brought from Nineveh and landed at Liverpool and stored in the museum there. These tablets (nearly 3,000 years old), just dug up from the ruins of Nineveh, comprise the books of a certain firm whose transactions they record, and from which it transpires that a large trade was done between Tyre and Nineveh. These silent documents in stone, exhumed from the rubbish mounds where they have slept for ages, bring before us Nineveh in the days of her power—the day of her trade — the day of her bustling merchants — the day of her active, practical, thriving city life, when crowds thronged her streets like the Liverpool of to-day, and when, as now, under similar circumstances, the thing that seemed of least consequence was the purpose of Israel's God, spoken through Israel's prophets, and quietly recorded in Israel's holy oracles against the day of fulfilment. The ruins themselves tell us of her architectural greatness—a greatness throwing modern cities into the shade. Birmingham is a mere collection of brick hovels compared with Nineveh with her spacious broadways and pillared edifices, where military power and mercantile importance held joint and powerful empire. We ask where is Nineveh? where her glory? We have but to read the prophecy before us as if it were history: "He will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like a wilderness. And flocks shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations: both the cormorant and the bittern shall lodge in the upper lintels of it: their voice shall sing in the windows; desolation shall be in the thresholds: for he shall uncover the cedar work."

Living nearly three thousand years after the day of Nineveh's greatness, we are the witnesses to the truth of this prediction. Nineveh has disappeared from the path of commerce, where she once occupied a position as supreme as that of London to-day. She is obliterated from the sphere of human greatness; she is no more. Nahum's words have been fulfilled: "The voice of thy messengers shall no more be heard." At the time these words were uttered, nothing seemed more unlikely; but the word of the Lord endureth for ever, and Nineveh has succumbed to its power.

"This is the rejoicing city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none beside me: how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in!" Are there no rejoicing cities in our day, dwelling carelessly, securely, and boasting in their greatness like Nineveh? Have we never heard that "Britannia rules the waves," and that "Britons never shall be slaves"? Have we never witnessed the roaring tempest of patriotism and seen the swelling waves of popular self-laudation and braggadocio? We have seen all this. We are surrounded by it. We have nothing to

do with it. It is mere paganism ; it is all of the flesh ; it is nothing at the root but the foolish boast of the savage. The false prophets of the day call it "Christian Patriotism," and many are carried away by the deceit ; but in truth there is no such thing as Christian patriotism, unless it be zeal for the land of promise. "Patriotism," so-called, is the mere glorification of the bit of earth's surface where you happen particularly to dwell, and the boasting in the privileges you happen to possess. What is there reasonable in this ? The patriotism of Nineveh, the glorification of Ninevite institutions and interests, brought Nineveh to perdition ; and it will bring all other countries to the same end, and with them all who share in the unenlightened nonsense of the rejoicing cities that dwell carelessly.

What brother of Christ would be found in the ranks of patriotism, blowing the bubble of national pride ? Only one who has not yet realized the calling to which he is called, which separates all brethren in every age from every "kindred and tongue, people, and nation," and forms them unto God a royal priesthood against the day when He will, by Christ, break all nations with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Such, in the day of their probation, have nothing to do with the potsherd of the earth but to let them alone to their own strife and their own toil in the fires of vanity. With John, their brother, they take high ground. They say "We are of God." They acknowledge themselves strangers and pilgrims in the world to which their coming captain has told them they do not belong. They refuse to be of it. They accept the consequences : the contempt of the rich ; the opposition of the poor ; the enmity of neighbours ; the loss of privilege ; the deprivation of honour ; exclusion from profit ; exposure to loss and shame and poverty and suffering ; yea, unto death itself, if, in the will of God, such a result await the course of faithfulness. It is only for a time. The day of trial will soon be over. "He that overcometh" will abide for ever in the day of the new heavens and the new earth, when the present state of things and all the glory of it will have passed away like a dream. The meek will then inherit the earth. He will be no stranger in it, but will be one of its great and powerful and honourable ones, established on the unmovable foundation of immortality. He will no longer have to struggle with the mortification of contempt and self-denial : every knee will bow to him as a constituent of the corporate Christ in all the earth, and all earth's plenty and delight will be at the disposal of his hand. He will no longer have to discipline himself from day to day to a patient continuance in well-doing by the power of a faith in the word of God, enabling him to overcome the world : for the day of light and liberty and the open vision will have come ; weakness will have given way to praise-inspiring strength ; patience, to the delights of perfect joy ; faith, to full, satisfying sight ; toil and conflict, to the open award of the victorious wreath and a bountiful share in the glory, honour and immortality of Jehovah manifest in the Son of David.

Looking For Great Things

The Scriptures and comfort.—Some of the things that are comforting.—A Question by God to Israel.—Incredulous on the subject of the promise.—The thing promised difficult to God?—Looking for great things.—Called “mad.”—An enemy more difficult to deal with.—The natural mind.—Knowledge corrects these feelings.—The heart of man, deceitful above all things.—Divine ways above the ways and thoughts of human experience.—The natural man an ignoramus.—The power of faith.—Looking beyond ourselves.—The Rock higher than we.—God not displeased at our weakness.—Faith and depression.—Ecstasy and unbelief.—Mere temperamental despondencies.—The clouds that hide the sun.—The hope will certainly be realized.—The saints will rule the world.—Not as they now are.—Qualified for the work.—“When that which is perfect is come.”—The Saints noble, vigorous, beautiful and brilliant, equal to the angels, but now, poor, weak, and ungifted.—It pleases God it should be so.—The comfort that belongs to the rich in faith.

THE Scriptures are mainly directed towards instruction and reproof. Nevertheless, they have much to do with comfort—that is, where the instruction and reproof have taken effect. Paul expressly declares of them that they were written that we, “through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, might have hope” (Rom. 15 : 4). God is described as the “God of all comfort” (2 Cor. 1 : 3). God Himself commands : “Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people” (Isa. 40 : 1), and Jesus makes promise to them that they “shall be comforted” (Matt. 5 : 4).

We have, this morning, to look at some of the things that are comforting, the contemplation of which enables us to realize in ourselves the condition which Paul describes as being “filled with all joy and peace in believing.” They are suggested by a question which has occurred in our recent daily readings addressed by God to Israel after the return from Babylon—a question which we may have read many times without perceiving anything specially suggestive in it, but which we shall find the gate to a path which leads to rich pastures. It occurs in Zech. 8, verse 6.

The question arises out of the circumstances of Israel at the time it was addressed to them. They had just returned from Babylon. The land was in desolation ; Jerusalem was in ruins ; and the adversaries of Judah were active and successful, as we learn from Ezra. The people were discouraged at this state of things. They were, in fact, “in great affliction and reproach” (Neh. 1 : 3). They had returned from Babylon with the expectation of a prosperous restoration, according to the promise by the prophets ; and finding so many difficulties, they seemed to have lost heart and faith, and to have come to the conclusion that “the time was not come that the Lord’s house should be built” (Hag. 1 : 2). In these

circumstances the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were sent to encourage them and strengthen their hands, and as a matter of fact, the work was finally accomplished through their influence (Ezra 6 : 14). It is in one of the messages by Jehovah that the question occurs which demands our attention. The encouragement takes the form of an assurance which, in their circumstances, they were tempted to think too good to be true. The assurance was : " I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem : and Jerusalem shall be called, A city of truth, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts, The holy mountain. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof." It matters little for present purpose whether we understand this to apply to the prosperity realized in the Babylonish restoration, or to the far greater well-being that will be Israel's portion under the Branch of Righteousness raised up unto David, when he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land (Jer. 33 : 14-16). It doubtless refers to the latter, in so far as it exhibits a picture of the future ; the future glory being held up to view as an incentive to labour for the development of Jerusalem's then-coming well-being.

The point lies in the question that follows : " If it be marvellous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, *should it also be marvellous in mine eyes ?* saith the Lord of hosts." It would appear from this that some who heard the words of the prophet were incredulous on the subject of the promise. It was " marvellous in their eyes " : they could not practically believe it ; it was too good to be true. Jerusalem was in adversity, and it seemed to them as if it must always remain so. They could not realize that it was possible for Israel to regain the consequence and prosperity that departed from them when Nebuchadnezzar overran the country, destroyed the cities and took the people captive more than seventy years before. The question put to them is, Was this inability of theirs to realize a promise of God a reason why it should not come ? Was their incredulousness a reason why the thing promised should be difficult to God ?

It seems to me the question has a very profitable application for us. We are looking for great things, because God has promised them. We are looking for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, after an absence of more than eighteen centuries. We are looking for his interference in human affairs when he arrives. We are looking for the violent overthrow, at his hands, of all the governments of the world. We are looking for the establishment, in his person, of a government in Jerusalem which shall rule the whole earth in righteousness, and kindness and true enlightenment and irresistible power, as the result of which mankind shall become a universal brotherhood, blessed with plenty and wisdom and joy. We are looking for a participation in that government. We are looking for a place in the innumerable body of kings and priests,

SEASONS OF COMFORT

through whom the authority of their One glorious Head will be administered in all the earth. In preparation for this exalted position we are looking for a physical renovation at the Lord's coming, such as it hath not entered into the heart of physiological speculation to conceive. We are looking for that which will change this vile body that it may be fashioned like unto the incorruptible, glorious and immortal body of the exalted Lord Jesus Christ ; by which all the saints of every age and nation will become a corporation of immortal rulers, gifted with exhaustless vigour, unerring wisdom, angelic grace, and endless life. We are looking for the abolition of the present order of things, and the setting up of a new world in which joy will be established in righteousness and glory to God.

For our hope of these things we are called mad. This we can easily endure. We know it is a mere question whether God has promised them. If He has promised them (and no man in true reason can dispose of the evidence that He has), then the madness lies with those who ignore them, and not with those who give good heed to them and rejoice in them. But there is an enemy more difficult to deal with than those who call us mad. That enemy we carry about in ourselves. It is our own short-sighted, weak, finite, sense-controlled mentalities. The natural mind is swayed by its own impressions, and these impressions are, in most matters, the very reverse of truth. I speak not only of spiritual but of natural things. For instance, a man feels as if he had never had a beginning ; he feels as if he never would die ; he feels as if the people that lived before him never had an existence. He feels as if his own town were the only town, his own feelings the only feelings, and so on. Knowledge corrects these feelings, and enables a man to be confident, though he does not feel it, that he was born not very long ago, that he will die in due course ; that other people's existence before him is no myth, etc. This knowledge comes partly from testimony. But suppose we were uninfluenced by reason and cut off from access to testimony, what would be the result ? The feelings would remain in their unmodified force and we should be barbarians, as exemplified in the untutored millions that inhabit the earth ; and as illustrated in varying degrees among all who are more or less educated.

Now this tendency to be victimized by fallacious feeling, styled by Paul "an evil heart of unbelief," and defined by the Spirit in Isaiah as "the heart of man, deceitful above all things and desperately wicked," is much more powerfully operative towards divine than towards human things—for two reasons : first, because divine ways and divine thoughts are as much above the ways and thoughts of human experience as the heaven is high above the earth (Isa. 55 : 9), resulting in a natural inability on our part to sympathize with them ; and secondly, they are more entirely beyond the range of human observation. They are matters of history, matters of promise ; matters of present invisible fact. Consequently, the mind has less opportunity, so to speak, to become impressed with them than to be impressed with matters that are of every-day perception. Hence it

is that wisdom is a thing that has to be "sought for as hid treasure"—a thing we have to go out of our way to take pains to get.

The natural man is an ignoramus with us all—both in the things of man and in the things of God, but a much more invincible ignoramus in the latter than in the former. Education reforms him a little in natural things; the instruction of the Word will bring him into comparative submission in spiritual things. Left to himself, he is a fool and a liar. We must shut our ears to him, he is whispering to us all the time; we carry him about with us. It was this old man, who is not only ignorant, but "corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," that led a class in Israel to speak incredulously of the promises of God. We hear him in our day saying, We are mad to believe the gospel: in a milder voice, he says, It is too good to be true. In a still more subdued tone, he is apt to suggest in our own bosoms, in the very midst of our faith, that we shall never know anything better than the present evil world and the present failing, stricken, groaning nature.

This is the foe which the power of faith will enable us to vanquish; never forgetting that "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10 : 17). It will enable us to say to the gloomy maunderings of the flesh, "Get thee behind me, Satan"; God hath spoken at sundry times and in divers manners. We have the evidence of it in our hands. The Bible alone is proof of it if we had no other evidence in the world. In what He has said there are "great and precious promises." What if the things promised transcend my brightest dreams? Is that a reason for doubting them? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Have I not received from Him even the little of good I now possess? Shall I say that He can do no better? Shall I set myself up against His own declaration that He will withhold no good thing from them that love him? Shall I shut my eyes to the express information that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him"?

No, no, brethren and sisters, let us look beyond ourselves, Let us mistrust the doleful feelings of the flesh. Let us lean on the Rock that is higher than we. Let us fix our thoughts on what He has promised. Let us not measure God or the hope of future good by our own thoughts or experience. The flesh is weak. Our fears are very largely due to this. Let us not be unduly distressed by them. They are known on high, and the cause of them. "He knoweth our frame: he remembereth that we are dust." Therefore, the context informs us, His pity is directed towards us if we fear Him. The fact of this pity was exemplified by the Lord in Gethsemane, when, finding his disciples asleep at the supreme hour of his mortal service, he said, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." This same Lord is our High Priest, "who ever liveth to make intercession for us, and who is able to save to the utmost those who come unto God by him." It is expressly testified of him that "having suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted." We may

SEASONS OF COMFORT

therefore take comfort. Our comfort is in God. We do not rely for comfort upon the state of our feelings. These may be depressed enough from physical causes. God is not displeased at our weakness ; He is displeased at a lacking faith and a faltering obedience.

This lesson has been obscured by the religious teaching in which most of us have been brought up, and some of us may be liable to suffer from the error now. We have been led to look at ecstatic feelings as the symptom of spiritual life, and to regard depression or even sobriety as indicative of deadness. Whereas faith and depression may co-exist as in the case of Job, David and the Man of Sorrows ; for faith is the confidence of things hoped for, as in the case of Abraham, the father of the faithful, who against hope believed in hope, being fully persuaded that what God had promised He was able also to perform. Not only so, but ecstasy and unbelief may co-exist, as in the case of the highly-wrought " revivalist " who mistakes the electrical excitement of the brain and nervous system for " religion," and rejects the testimony of God and His prophets and apostles while shouting " Glory, Hallelujah."

Let us not give way to mere temperamental despondencies when they come. Let us remember they belong to us and not to God. They are as the clouds that hide the sun from view ; the clouds are all on the surface of the earth : the sun shines on with undimmed brilliancy in the perpetual blue beyond. One thing we may always remember : " without faith it is impossible to please him." We may have plenty of animal spirits and no faith ; plenty of mental and physical comfort, and no favour with God. Faith is not excitement. It is the calm conviction that God will fulfil the promises He has made, leading, through the love of those promises, to the fruit of an obedient life, even if oftentimes clouded with that " heaviness through manifold temptation " which was no less the portion of saints in apostolic days than in our own (1 Pet. 1 : 6).

The hope set before us in the gospel will certainly be realized whatever human feelings may suggest to the contrary. The saints will certainly yet rule the world, however unlikely such a consummation may appear to human wisdom. The politician of this *aiōn* is filled with contempt at the idea, because he looks no higher than men. He looks at the " poor of this world, rich in faith," whom God hath chosen as " heirs of the kingdom he hath promised to those that love him," and he jeeringly exclaims, " Are these the people that are to rule the world ? " If we say " Yes," he enlarges : " What ! These poor decrepit decaying creatures ? These illiterate, unpolished creatures—these wretched people who do not know how to speak their mother tongue correctly, who lack the commonest capacity to deal with matters of business, let alone affairs of government ! " If he goes as far as I have heard some go, he will say, " God save me from the age to come if it is to be managed by such people." In this he speaks unwisely, through not having a due regard to the facts of the case. He might master these facts of the case if he had sufficient simplicity and earnestness to look into them. Instead of this, he glances with pride at certain superficial aspects of them,

and blunders with a childish ignorance, where he thinks he displays a superior wisdom. He looks at the raw material and scorns the use to which wisdom can turn it. He looks at a mass of unwrought iron. He is told that by means of it, men will yet travel in comfort at sixty miles an hour. He exclaims: "God preserve me from such a concern." He is shown a piece of wire, and informed that by it, a man may converse with his friend at many miles distance. He cries out, "You mock me!" He is shown the stuff out of which the rulers of the future age are made, and he says, "God save me from them."

The saints will not rule the world as they now are. They would be incompetent for the work in every sense of the term. Such of them as are chosen will be qualified for the work before they are called to enter upon it. To begin with, they will be immortalized, which of itself will give them a vigour of body and mind that will go a long way towards making them fit to hold a divine commission. In addition to this, they will be endowed with powers and gifts unknown to the human organization. We learn this from the gifts of the Spirit vouchsafed in the apostolic age, which are styled "the powers of the world to come" (Heb. 6 : 5), "the earnest of the inheritance" (Eph. 1 : 14). Paul, on this point, expressly says, that "when *that which is perfect is come*, that which is in part shall be done away" (1 Cor. 13 : 10). What is styled "that which is in part" may be learnt from 1 Cor. 12 : 4-12, where we read of supernatural gifts of wisdom, faith, knowledge, tongues, and healing. He further says, "Then shall we know *even as we are known*." In speaking, then, of the saints ruling the world, we are not to picture to ourselves the world governed by the poor, fainting, failing, ungifted men and women who constitute the saints in the days of their probation. The saints in the age to come will be a noble, vigorous, beautiful and brilliant order of beings, equal to the angels: the sons and daughters of the Lord God Almighty in the final aspect of their development. As we see them now, they are only in the preliminary stage of their development, poor, weak, and ungifted. In one thing only are they rich, without which they are not saints. They are "rich in faith," without which it is impossible to please God; and this one thing, which is their essential qualification, is the one thing that is most of all derided by the class of proud scorners to whose objections I have been referring. So entirely do the ways of man differ from the ways of God that, if they were called upon to select an order of rulers for the coming kingdom, they would choose the rich, the talented, the well-favoured, the goodlooking, the physically-developed, the finely-educated, the well-mannered, the people of good breeding—in short, the respectable and the great, or as Paul expresses it, "the wise after the flesh, the noble, the mighty" (1 Cor. 1 : 26). Even Samuel leant a little in this direction when he was sent to anoint a successor to Saul. "He looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him. But the Lord said unto Samuel, *Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature*; because I have refused him: FOR THE LORD SEETH NOT AS MAN

SEASONS OF COMFORT

SEETH ; *for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart* ” (1 Sam. 16 : 6). What state of the heart is it that is appreciated by the Eternal Creator? He tells us : “ To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that trembleth at my word ” (Isa. 66 : 2). This is the state of mind which makes a man a saint in the present mortal state ; it is this that qualifies him for the future rulership of the world. It is not creature strength or excellence ; it is not human culture or attainment. It is the faith that receives the kingdom of God as a little child, and as a consequence, rejoices in it as the supreme good and excellence of existence.

It pleases God that it should be so. Paul tells us the reason : “ that no flesh should glory in his presence.” The rich man glories in his riches ; the wise man (so considered) glories in his wisdom ; the strong man glories in his strength. It is the universal rule in the present evil world. It is barbarism, for all these things are held in trust as favours from God, and can be only rationally held when this is recognized and expressed in the ascription which belongs to God. Holding them as the world holds them, it is theft and robbery. God makes choice of His sons and daughters among those who are in a position more favourable for learning wisdom in the matter—among those who having nothing to boast of, learn to make their boast in God ; who having no possession but the possession of the word, are able to rejoice in it and esteem it more than their necessary food (Job 23 : 12) ; who having none of the perishable riches, prize the riches of Christ at their true unsearchable value, counting all things but dung that they may obtain them (Phil. 3 : 8). Let the poor then rejoice in the comfort that belongs to them, taking care only to see to it that while poor in this world, they are not poor also in faith, for then they are poor, poor indeed.

The Logic Of The Stars

The Greatness of Jehovah.—The starry depths.—The magnitude of each single orb.—The vastness of the distances that separate them.—Overawed and stunned.—The stars have not always existed.—A cause equal to their evolution.—The concrete of the invisible.—A piece of ice.—In the sun ; it melts.—The water will evaporate.—Paper or wood ; the flame dissipates their substance.—Heaven and earth throughout.—The concrete or condensation of invisible energy.—How came they forth?—Science vouchsafes no answer.—Science itself is against the scientists.—At the lowest depth of investigation, science discovers things “made.”—The unutterable grandeur of the Lord God of Israel.—His promises.—“The whole earth shall be filled with His glory.”—The gospel supplies our need.—Conviction founded on facts.—Facts we have not seen.—Go back in order to go forward.—Christ upon earth.—The world not all darkness and noise.—The appointed exit into the light.—A destiny beyond every human aspiration.

IN the Scripture read this morning, our thoughts are in a special manner directed to the contemplation of the rock on which we stand. Psalm 96, like all other Psalms, fixes our minds on God. One of the statements in it has a peculiar power in this direction. I refer to verse 5 : “All the gods of the nations are idols : but the Lord made the heavens.” The force lies in the statement that Jehovah “made the heavens.” It is impossible to convey a more powerful idea of the greatness of Jehovah than is expressed in these few words. We realize this best, perhaps, on a starry night, when we walk abroad under the vast expanse overhead. We seem impressed at night as we are not in the day with the greatness of heaven above. In the daytime, the clouds limit the view, or the blue sky gives us the idea of a roof that shuts us in from the rest of the universe. Comfort and tranquillity belong to the daylight. At night, the starry depths are revealed ; the silent glory of a thousand twinkling points of light seems to speak of power and immensity more impressively than the sun’s golden flood. As we scan the shining host and think of the magnitude of each single orb, and the vastness of the distances that separate them one from another, though apparently near together ; and of the exactness of their order and their movements, though apparently massed in confusion, we are simply overawed and stunned. We feel we have no faculty to grasp the stupendousness of this wonderful creation. We sink tired to the ground. But the effort is not useless. It helps us to have some faint conception of the Creator. It helps us to respond to God’s own appeal when He says : “To whom will ye liken me, or shall I be equal ? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number : he calleth them all by name ; by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power, not one faileth ” (Isa. 40 : 25).

If God made the heavens, it is a natural thing to argue how great must God be. "Ah, true," say some; "but how do we know He made them?" There is an answer to that; but this is not the time for it. Suffice it to say that all minds of the higher order are impressed with the evidence afforded by the starry host of the existence of a Creator. Napoleon I, a man of unusual intellectual vigour, though a despiser of priests, was no deaf listener to the logic of the stars. It is reported of him that during the voyage to Egypt, when surrounded on deck by a number of officers, who were discussing Voltaire's doctrines among themselves, he said, "It is all very well, gentlemen, but who made these?"—pointing to the stars. That the stars have not always existed is a recognized and demonstrable fact. A cause equal to their evolution must, therefore, have preceded them, so that our sighing friends may take rest in the simple fact that God made them. "But how did He make them?" Well, He did not make them as a man makes a chair or table. His ways are higher than man's in all respects. "By his Spirit he hath garnished the heavens" (Job 26 : 13). The Spirit affects and controls the very atomic constituents of all substance. All things are but the concrete of the invisible. I will illustrate what I mean. Take a piece of ice: here you have solid substance that you can see and handle. Place it out in the sun; it melts; now you have water, but wait long enough, the water will evaporate, and nothing will be left. The solid ice has disappeared. Its elements exist, but they are invisible. But you may say, "Well, of course, everybody knows ice disappears in that way; what has that to do with things in general?" It has this much to do with it: that it is a common and easily-comprehended illustration of what can be done with everything. You burn paper or wood, and the flame dissipates their substance into the invisible. You dissolve the hardest metals in the appropriate acid, and compound it chemically into a solution that will evaporate and leave nothing behind but a sediment which can, in its turn, be treated and dispelled in the same way. In all these cases, you resolve substance into invisible energy. You do not destroy it; you transmute it; yet you cannot restore it, and it cannot of itself come back into the original combination. Now what is true of little things, such as those I have mentioned, is true of heaven and earth throughout, so far as abstract possibility is concerned. They could be resolved into invisible power. They are but the concrete or condensation of invisible energy. Invisible energy preceded them, and out of it they have come. But the question is, how came they forth? How is it that out of the same simple primal energy that fills the universe have come such endless diversity of substance, form, function, and glory? (For it must be remembered that the various invisible elements into which substances can be chemically resolved—such as oxygen, hydrogen, carbon and the like, are themselves further reducible into a common primal force.) To this question, the science of our day vouchsafes no answer. It first says that it cannot tell, and then that it is no business of science to tell. In a certain sense this is true, and we might leave science

out of the question altogether, were it not that, in the hands of some of its professors, it dogmatizes against the answer which the Bible gives. In such a case we have to show that science itself is against the scientists, inasmuch as when thoroughly followed out, it shows us a situation of things that requires the existence of an all-wise and all-powerful initiative to account for things as they are. All scientists, however, have not thus to be combated. The truly philosophic minds who can follow facts to their ultimate issues—such as Professor Tyndall and Professor Pritchard—admit the idea of a Creator as compatible with science. Some go further than allowing it compatible. They say that the minutest atoms that go to make this and that, have all the appearance of manufactured articles; that is, particles designed specifically and differentially for those chemical affinities that result in certain forms of substance. So that, at the lowest depth of investigation, science discovers things “made,” though unable to throw any light on the question—“Who made them?” Thus the child and the philosopher meet. They arrive by a different road, but reach the same destination. The philosopher, after much labour and thought, says, “Creation has been made”; the child in the nursery says the same thing on the strength of simple impression and direct information. The class between think it beneath their education and their dignity to profess so simple a faith. But it is the true faith, at once simple and profound. At no greater truth can we arrive, and on no softer pillow can we lay the wearied intellect than what is contained in God’s own declaration: “All those things hath mine hand made” (Isa. 66 : 2), echoed by John (chap. 1). “All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made.”

And so we lift our eyes again to the heavens, and learn from their glory the unsearchable and unutterable grandeur of the Lord God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. Well may we tremble at His word; well may we have His name in reverence; well may we love and fear Him with all our heart and soul, and strength and mind, as required of us.

But the picture is not complete without His promises. Apart from these, the greatness of God would only seem an aggravation of our lot. The glory of heaven and earth would only mock us, so to speak, if we had no hope, and were without God in the world. What is the glorious sunshine to men cast away in an open boat at sea without food and water? It is an aggravation of their miseries. So might men say, “Of what good to us is this stupendousness of power and wisdom? What interest can we take in the beauty and the glory and the magnitude of the universe? Why ask us to rejoice in the shining host of heaven? We are wretched. The human race is debased. Nine hundred and ninety-nine in a thousand are in poverty—poverty of pocket, poverty of mind, poverty of nature. Unscrupulous cleverness lords it over the interests of mankind. Iniquity is established. All are dying. Life is a troubled dream. Vanity and vexation of spirit is written over all.” True, true, true, is the lamentation; and if we could know nothing more of God than the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

greatness manifest in heaven and earth, we might well join with Job and Jeremiah in wishing we had never appeared in such an orphaned state of existence.

But the case stands otherwise, and this is the gospel. Things are bad, but it is for a reason, and a good state of things will come. "Yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be : yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth ; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Psa. 37 : 10). "The whole earth shall be filled with his glory." "The kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." Sin hath reigned unto death ; but death shall be swallowed up of victory. The redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing unto Zion ; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads. The Lord God shall wipe away tears from off all faces, and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth. The tabernacle of God shall be with men ; He shall be their God, and they shall be His people. And God will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more curse and no more death.

The gospel of Christ exactly supplies our need. It gives us hope and joy in heaven and earth. It enables us to feel even now in the Father's house. True, it is only faith ; but faith must come before sight ; so it pleases God to appoint. Without faith it is impossible to please Him, and we must please Him before He will admit us to the riches of His glory. But let us realize what faith is. It is not the thing some people talk about. It is not a thing taken for granted without certainty. It is not a mental phantom ; it is not a sentiment ; it is not a fancy. It is "the substance of things hoped for," and the things are hoped for because they have been promised, and we are sure they have been promised, and we know that He is faithful that hath promised. It is conviction founded on facts. The man of unbelief looks with contempt on the man of faith. The facts would justify the contrary relation of things. The man of unbelief is such because of ignorance, and his ignorance is due to a bias in favour of present things, which prevents him from subjecting himself to the agency of knowledge. He loves the present world, and he chooses to suppose that things will never be different from what they are. He listens to the glowing hopes of the believer with a patronizing pity. "My dear fellow," he says, "it is all very beautiful, but it belongs to Utopia. Existence is a stern affair, and has no place for such roseate dreams." What can we say ? We can say this, that if we are to take what now is as the measure and interpretation of what is to be, our patronizing friend may have some standing ground. But where is the wise man who would seriously propound such a doctrine, even a natural philosopher ? He cannot be found ; the fools, of course, are plentiful enough. There was a time when there were no men upon earth, our enemies themselves being judges ; upon our patronizing friend's principle there ought, therefore, never to have been men upon earth. The principle will not stand for a moment. The limited experience of corruptible man is the unsafest

of all rules to work by as to possible futurity. We must not confine our view to what we individually see and feel. We must take in facts we have not seen. In this respect we must go back in order to go forward. If we go back far enough, we find Christ upon earth, doing wonders, speaking as man never spoke. We find Christ crucified; Christ raised from the dead, and Christ ascended into heaven. We find Christ preached by a miracle-working apostleship, and on these facts alone we find a foundation for the hope that the day is coming when the state of things on earth will be in complete harmony with the wisdom and the beauty and the glory, which our own eyes can see now in heaven above and earth beneath; a day when Christ will return according to his promise, and bring all things into subjection to his glorious will.

Let us rise to this wide range of vision. Let us reject the impressions which a too close confinement in the lines and channels of our petty life is apt to make on our minds. Let us not make the mistake of judging the ages by our few and evil days. This is the mistake that is made by men around us. They argue that because they find things in a certain way, things will never be different. It is as if a schoolboy were to conclude he would never be done with school. Or transfer the illustration to some of those animalculæ that naturalists tell us come into existence and die with every breath. In a train going through a railway tunnel, many would be born and die during the passage. Suppose they could think; judging by their own experience, they would imagine the world was all darkness and noise. They would have no knowledge of the smiling country and the glorious sunlight at the other end of the tunnel. They would not be aware the tunnel had any end. That is how it is with the poor mortals who set up their experience of the present darkness and confusion as the measure of our hopes. Because they live and die in darkness, they think we shall always be in the tunnel; they have no knowledge of the appointed exit into the light, and the arrival at the glorious terminus, where the train will stop and the passengers will get out for a settlement in safety and comfort and peace.

The truth emancipates us from the depressing company of such thoughts. It brings to us the joyful news of an age of light and strength and righteousness and joy, which shall dawn when the present night shall have passed away. It exhibits to us a destiny beyond every human aspiration in its height, and transcending our highest conceptions in its glory. It holds before us a prize that beggars all ordinary appeals to human motive and human exertion—a prize that combines, in an ineffable form, all the conditions of well-being that man has ever experienced or that the heart has ever conceived. This whole coming glory is, meanwhile, in the absolute prerogative of that wonderful man—the marvel of history—**THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD**—God manifest in the flesh—Jesus crucified and now exalted, in whom abides all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. What shall we say, then, but that Paul was a wise man, whose company we shall try to keep, when he said: "I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus,

my Lord : for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him.”

Remembering Christ Acceptably

Bringing Christ to remembrance.—Different ways.—An historical character.—A present loving personage.—The coming vanquisher of Gentile power.—The Lamb of God.—The judge of our actions.—The loving and forgiving friend.—The denouncer of unrighteousness.—The Father in him.—Remembering Christ.—As the manifestation of the Father's glory.—Not a mere man.—Not a Son without a will of his own.—Another Jesus.—Association of the Father with Jesus.—The great revelation.—The goodness of God.—He “left not himself without witness.”—The beneficent aspects of nature.—Other forms.—The Jews in our midst.—History an evidence of the sure word of prophecy.—The four great empires.—The papal horn with eyes.—Christ a living footprint of God on earth.—Gaze at his picture.—Forcing Himself into our presence.—The Bible an all-sufficient witness for God.—A rock nothing can move.—Soliloquize with delight.—Ascend boldly to the throne.

WE are all aware that the object of these meetings for the breaking of bread is to bring Christ to remembrance ; and we doubtless realize in our experience of them how entirely they are adapted to the purpose in view. Christ is brought vividly before us every time we surround the table, and our memories are refreshed and our purpose strengthened with regard to that future purpose of divine love which centres in him. But there are different ways in which this memory of Christ can be contemplated. The contemplation that will be acceptable to Christ himself is the one we must aim at, and that contemplation is one which embraces all sides of him, so to speak. We must not think of him merely as an historical character ; we must realize him as a present loving personage, exalted in glory at the Father's right hand as a priest over the house of God, and cognizant of all his brethren by the Spirit, to which he now stands in the same relation of omniscience and omnipotence as the Father. We must not think of him merely as the coming vanquisher of Gentile power and the ruler of universal man in the age of blessing ; we must recall him as the Lamb of God who sojourned among men in sorrow and dishonour 1,800 years ago, and who obediently submitted to the cruel death in which it pleased God to offer up the condemned nature of Adam which he wore, as a sacrifice through which the contrite-hearted amongst the sinful sons of men might approach him in reconciliation and worship. We must think of him not only as the immortalizer of our bodies, but as the judge of our actions

at his coming ; not only as a merciful and faithful high priest, but as the inflicter of vengeance in flaming fire on all the disobedient ; not only as the loving and forgiving friend, but as the zealous teacher, the denouncer of unrighteousness, the insister on holiness, the exactor of our utmost affection, and repudiator of the present evil world and all who belong to it. We must remember him not only as brother, but as Lord ; not only as the seed of David, but as the Word made flesh. In a word, we must open our minds to THE TRUTH, of which he is the personal incorporation.

In doing this, there is one thing we will not fail to do. We will remember the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole system of truth derives its meaning, and apart from whom it would have no reason or existence. As no man can come to the Father but by Christ, so no man can scripturally come to Christ who does not discern the Father in him. Jesus gave, as the reason of his enemies rejecting him, that they had not known the Father. He said if God had been their Father they would have loved him whom the Father had sanctified and sent into the world, saying further, " I and my Father are one." He said to his disciples, " If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also " ; and added, to Philip's great surprise, " From henceforth ye know him, and have seen him . . . He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." One of the most conspicuous features of Christ's teaching on earth was the prominence which he gave to the Father's relation to all he said and did. He expressly said, " I am come in my Father's name " ; and describing, in his prayer to the Father, the work he had accomplished on the earth, he said, " I have manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me."

In remembering Christ, then, in the breaking of bread, we do not remember him as he desires to be remembered, unless we remember him as the manifestation of the Father's glory, the exhibitor of the Father's mind, the exerciser of the Father's power, the Father come nigh to us in him—" God in Christ reconciling the world to himself." The Father, indeed, is the glory of Christ. Apart from Him, there would have been no Christ, who though a Son who learned obedience by the things that he suffered, is yet the Father in manifestation ; for though he said, " The works that I do, I do not of myself," he also said, " The Father who is in me, he doeth the works." To remember Christ, then, is to remember the Father also who dwelt in him and made him what he was. To remember a mere man is not to remember Christ ; and to remember a Son without a will of his own is not to remember him. To remember him scripturally is to remember him as he is presented in his discourses to his disciples, in which, while exhibiting himself as the voluntary subject of the Father, he expressed surprise that he should have been so long with his disciples without their knowing that in looking upon him, they looked upon the Father manifest in His Son.

We have every reason to rejoice in this aspect of the memories that circle round the table of the Lord. Jesus brings the Father very near to us in the words he spoke to his disciples about him—near,

SEASONS OF COMFORT

I mean, as regards the Father's attitude or disposition towards us. We are liable to think of the Father as a distant and unapproachable majesty. He is, doubtless, this, apart from Christ; but we are liable to continue to think of Him in this way even in connection with Christ. Christ dissipates all such thoughts by the words addressed to his disciples in the last conversation he had with them in the flesh. He said, "I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for *the Father himself loveth you*, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God." He makes our connection with the Father's love even more intimate and practically obvious in the following words: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. . . . At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you." To detach Christ from the Father is, therefore, an impossibility, and to see Christ without seeing the Father is not to see the Christ of the Scriptures but another Jesus than the one Paul preached.

It is most comforting to dwell upon this association of the Father with Jesus. It is the association to which Paul gives such fervid emphasis when he says that "nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This is, in fact, the great revelation concerning God which shines through the whole course of Scripture. It was proclaimed even at Sinai that Jehovah is "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." The fact was illustrated in all the history of Israel's transgressions which the Psalmist thus summarizes: "Their heart was not right with him, neither were they steadfast in his covenant; but he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not; yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath; for he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again." The Psalms of David, which are to us the voice of God, abound with comforting declarations on this subject. This may be taken as a specimen of all: "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him."

The goodness of God is the sublimest fact in the universe. Let us open our hearts to the fulness of the consolation. We may rob ourselves of the comfort through sheer thoughtlessness, and lay ourselves open to the sharp rebuke implied in Christ's words to Peter: "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" It may be said, we forget because we do not see; but why do we not see? Is it not because we allow ourselves to become blind with a blindness that is curable? Paul, addressing the idolatrous priests and people at Lystra, while allowing that God had "suffered all nations

to walk in their own ways," adds, "Nevertheless, he *left not himself without witness*, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." According to this, Paul expected ordinary intelligence to be able to see evidence of God's goodness in the beneficent appointments of nature. There is no doubt that in this Paul was in the right. Although there is much that seems terrible in the operations of nature, it must be apparent to the shallowest reflection that there is a weighty preponderance of that which is manifestly good, and that the principal afflictions of the human race come from their own unloving actions one to another. Even that which is evil in nature is found closely allied with the accomplishment of good, such as the purification of earth and air, effected by the tempests of winter. Taking nature in its totality, beneficence is distinctly visible on its face, and therefore a contriver of good.

Now, if Paul expected unenlightened men, in the pre-apostolic age, to discern evidence of God's existence and goodness in the beneficent aspects of nature, what would he not expect of our generation with so many more materials for conviction? If it could be said that God left not Himself without witness when He gave the rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, what may we not say when he has given the fulfilment of His word in so many forms before our eyes? Have we not the Jews in our midst, dispersed in all the countries, after centuries of tumult and confusion, as declared by the prophets? Are they not "His witnesses"—witnesses that He is God—as God Himself has said? (Isa. 43 : 10-13). Could any human discernment have foreseen that a scattered and persecuted race would continue to exist when the mighty nations of antiquity should have passed away? Would not a merely human discernment, speculating on probability, have surmised that the Jews in dispersion, especially harbouring, as they did, a desire for conformity to the Gentile nations, would, in course of time, have become absorbed and lost in the surrounding populations among whom they mixed so constantly in business and otherwise? Yet there they are, a distinct people among all peoples, circumcising their children, worshipping the God of Abraham in their synagogues, observing the feasts of Moses, so far as they can be observed in a strange land, and looking forward, the bulk of them, to the day of promised restoration. Are they not witnesses for God and helpers to our faith?

And what of the Gentiles? Has God given us no witnesses in them? Have we not in their history the evidence of a sure word of prophecy—quite apart from the events which are so powerfully stimulating our hopes in this the time of the end? Have events for ages not run in the groove marked out for them in the "things revealed unto Daniel," and in the vision signified to His servant John? Can we forget the four great empires, each with the characteristic details corresponding to the symbolism of the prophecy? Can we shut our eyes to the chequered career of the fourth kingdom upon earth, with its horn-subdivisions and barbarian clay admixture from the north; and its papal horn with eyes, lording it over all?

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Can we forget the city reigning over the Roman kings which has made the inhabitants of the earth, for ages, drunk, in a spiritual intoxication of false doctrine, false spirit, false precept and institutions, and with whom the kings of the earth have lived deliciously? What human foresight could have disclosed these things which have come to pass? Where is the man, in our age—an age supposed to excel all previous times in discernment and penetration—where is the man who can tell us a single day ahead what shall come to pass among the nations of the earth? We know he is not to be found. What is the conclusion? Hath not God given us “witness” of Himself in the accomplished history of the Gentiles?

And what shall we say of Christ? No man can obliterate this living footprint of God on earth. Whatever explanation men may try to give of him (and learned men have vainly exerted their profoundest ingenuity to bring him within the category of common men), they cannot deny him as a fact of history. He has left his mark too deep for that. His name is in all the archives and political documents of the civilized world for ages past. Only men who doze in a moral and intellectual torpor, engrossed with the affairs of their private lives, can be insensible to the mass of incontestable, palpable facts that tell us that Jesus of Nazareth appeared upon the stage of history 1,800 years ago, and astonished the world by “works which none other man did,” and words “such as never man spake.” Gaze at his picture as it shows itself to us in the authenticated records of the past. Is it not natural for us to unite in the question put by his neighbours: “Whence hath this man this wisdom and these mighty works?” And is it not equally natural for us to say with Nicodemus who visited Jesus by night: “We know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles which thou doest, except God be with him”? Verily if God left not Himself without witness, in giving us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, He has almost forced Himself into our presence in the gift of His beloved Son, the true and faithful witness, who came not in his own but in his Father’s name, glorifying Him on the earth and finishing the work which He gave him to do.

Finally, what can a man say about the want of evidence who possesses the Bible? Anything said by such a man in this direction must be said because he is unacquainted with the treasure in his hands. The existence of the Bible itself becomes at last an all-sufficient witness for God, even without the external testimony at which I have glanced. The Bible cannot be accounted for on any theory that supposes a merely human authorship. This, the strongest witness for God, is the last perhaps to be felt in its fulness of force, on account of the slowness of the process which leads to its apprehension, which is the complete acquaintance with the Bible to be acquired only in the daily reading of it for years, and the corresponding acquaintance with the ways and thoughts of man obtained by experience. When, however, this witness is fully apprehended, faith is established on a rock nothing can move.

What is the sum and substance of the whole matter? What

REMEMBERING CHRIST ACCEPTABLY

but that which Paul declares, that we have a strong consolation who have fled for refuge to the hope set before us? The consolation arises from the fact that in breaking bread and drinking wine, as we do from Sunday morning to Sunday morning, in obedience to the commandments of Christ, we bring not only Christ to memory, but his Father and our Father—the Creator of heaven and earth, who fainteth not, neither is weary, and there is no searching of His understanding; and with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning. We can say with Moses and Israel when they came out of Egypt: “The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation. He is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him.” We can shout with David: “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower.” Shall we not therefore be able rejoicingly to say, “I will not fear what man can do unto me”? Yea, and we shall, like David, commune with our own hearts and soliloquize with a delight unknown to the poetry of the heathen: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” Rising with a stronger flight we shall emerge from soliloquy and ascend boldly to the throne with words which, acceptable at the mouth of the man after God’s own heart, will not be rejected at our hands if we approach with contrite spirits, clean hands, and a pure heart; “I will extol thee, my God, O King; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever. Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. . . . I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works.”

The Power Of The Scriptures

The Scriptures given by inspiration.—Thoroughly furnishing unto all good works—not partially.—Not found in opposite extremes.—A right division of the word of truth.—The counsel by which God now guides His people.—The book written by holy men.—Moved by the Holy Spirit.—A tendency to glorify the human mind.—Disparagement of the Bible.—The falsehood double.—Folly native.—Beautiful gammon.—An emasculate generation of pleasure hunters.—The Bible our light and our life.—“Whoso despiseth the Word shall be destroyed.”—Another class equally dangerous.—The Scriptures in the estimation of the apostles.—It hath not pleased God to vouchsafe the Spirit’s presence.—The Holy Oracles our only hope.—A rejoicing enemy.—The Spirit of God not working with the popular systems.—These systems differ one from another.—They reject with scorn the teaching of the apostles and prophets.—A spirit which they “feel.”—Not the Spirit of God, the spirit of man.—“The spirit of the flesh.”—The Spirit of God comes not in our day.—Repudiate a false claim.—The Bible the only safe and sure guide.—Active and direct guidance.—Did not displace the written guidance.—David’s devoted appreciation of the law and the testimony.—The counsel reduced to writing.—God does not leave us to the Bible merely.—He helps.—But all is dependent on our waiting on the word in daily reading.

IN one of the Psalms it is written, “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.” These words are comprehensive words. They may be used by every saint of God, whenever and wheresoever living and dwelling. They cover and define the position of every heir of salvation. They express accurately his present relation to God and all the hopes growing out of it. It is true of all of them, without exception, in whatever age or nation, that they are guided during their mortal probation by the Divine counsel, and will afterwards at the appointed time, be received in one joyful company into that glory, honour and immortality which God hath in store for those who please Him—to be manifested at the second appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us ponder its import with regard to the present time. Let us realize some of its applications to our present ways; for this will be for our profit, and thus shall we fulfil in ourselves the saying of Paul, that the Scripture given by inspiration, which is profitable for instruction in righteousness, has been given, “that the man of God may be perfect, *thoroughly furnished unto all good works*”—not partially, but thoroughly furnished, wealthily furnished, heartily furnished, efficiently furnished, zealously furnished—even to the point of having the word of Christ dwelling in us *richly*, with that intensity of appreciation expressed in the words, “My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times.” And furnished unto *all good works*—not one or two; not like those

who perform one set of duties and neglect others : who attend lectures, but absent themselves from the breaking of bread ; who like to argue about first principles, but disdain exhortation to holiness and prayer : who get up public meetings, but forget the ministrations of the saints : who like discussion, but have no taste for worship : who are interested in the signs of the times, but dull on the law of Christ : who take an interest in the stranger, but forget love to the brethren : who zealously invoke the law and the testimony, but neglect the daily reading of the Scriptures : who teach doctrine, but pass over mercy and the love of God : who are diligent in business, but do not serve the Lord ; who cherish theory, but fail in practice ; who are alive to correctness of belief, but dead to holiness of life ; who contend for the faith, but neglect the works without which faith is dead ; who promise liberty to others, while they themselves are servants of corruption. On the other hand, the man of God, furnished unto all good works, will not be found in opposite extremes. He will not exalt "charity" over the gospel : he will not preach "love" where the word of God is corrupted ; he will not advocate peace where there is not purity ; he will not hold up almsgiving as the way of salvation ; he will not inculcate union and friendship with the world on the plea of loving our neighbours as ourselves. For everything there is a time and a place ; and the study of the word will teach us the when and the where. There is a right division of the word of truth and a handling of the word of God deceitfully. The man of God, thoroughly furnished unto all good works, will discern instinctively the one and the other, and be enabled to give its right place to every part of the word of the testimony.

How, then, are the heirs of salvation guided by the counsel of God in the days of their sojourn in the present evil world ? Timothy is an example, to whom Paul declares that "from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, *which are able to make thee wise unto salvation.*" Paul's parting benediction to the brethren of Ephesus contains the same answer : "I commend you to God, and to *the word of his grace, which is able to build you up,* and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." The Psalmist gives the same idea plainly in the words we all know : "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." Finally Christ affirms it in those words of petition concerning his disciples : "Sanctify them through thy truth : Thy word is truth."

We live in an age when it is particularly necessary to recognize and insist upon this truth, that the counsel by which God now guides His people whom He shall afterwards receive to glory, is contained in the book written by holy men of old who spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. On all hands, there is a tendency to glorify the human mind as containing wisdom sufficient for guidance in spiritual things. We are asked to look into ourselves for light. It is taught that a degree of inspiration appertains to all men. We are asked to cultivate our faculties as the surest mode of obtaining a safe direction in the highest affairs of human well-being. This

style of doctrine usually goes along with disparagement of the Bible. The preachers of it say that the Bible was very good in its day ; that, in fact, we owe a great deal to it, but that we have outgrown it ; that we have attained to further light ; that our progress has made it obsolete, and that it is no more suited to the spiritual need of man now than ancient treatises are useful to modern students of chemistry. This is a dangerous doctrine, because it is pleasant falsehood.

Repulsive lies are innocuous : it is those that come with good words and fair speeches that expose us to mortal peril. It is flattering to be told we are wise ; and that even the "good old book" (as modern pagans patronizingly phrase it) is a long way in our rear. The falsehood is double. It is not true that we have wisdom in us ; and it is not true that the Bible has lost an atom of its transcendent value to poor perishing man. Folly and not wisdom is the native evolution of our minds. Knowledge of all sorts has to be put in, and we have to keep putting it in for it to stay. Paul was more accurate as a matter of mental philosophy, when he said : "In me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing," than the stilted writers of our day, who, in a cloud of picturesque talk, glorify humanity as a good and noble thing. Their dissertations are mostly beautiful falsehood. Novels are the order of the day in more senses than one. Truth is too plain and too stern for an emasculated generation of pleasure hunters. But truth is beautiful for all that, and a tree of life and a spring of everlasting pleasure, as her faithful friends will realize when he who is the truth will come, and gird himself and make them sit down to meat and serve them. The Bible is our light and our life as much to-day as when fresh from the hands of its Author. If possible, it is more so, for those who received "the lively oracles" were under the power of what they had "seen and heard" in the course of the delivery of them, while we are wholly indebted to what we read in them. As we value our life, let us stand with indomitable resolution against all doctrines that would either flatter our spiritual dignity or detract from the authority or importance of the Scriptures in the least particle. The day will come when that which is written will be manifest to all men, namely, "Whoso despiseth the Word shall be destroyed" : and "their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust, who cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despise the word of the Holy One of Israel." "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil ; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness ; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter ! Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight !"

There is another class, more numerous perhaps, among our immediate neighbours at all events, and whose doctrine in another direction is equally dangerous. I mean those who are so glib in the use of Paul's words in a sense totally different from that in which Paul used them : "The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." This class say the Bible is all very well in its place, but that what we have to look to is the indwelling and abiding presence of that Spirit

of Truth which Christ promised to his disciples, and which he said would guide them into all truth. Doubtless, it would be a great privilege, the value and comfort of which it would be impossible to exaggerate, if we had with us, as he was with the apostles, "the Comforter," the Spirit of Truth, whom the world "cannot receive," and who would "show us things to come." But even if we had, the Spirit as a living intelligent presence with us would not discredit or disparage what that same Spirit had caused to be "written for our learning." We should at least, even in that case, hold the Scriptures in the same estimation as the apostles who, though they had the Spirit, appealed to them in their reasonings about Christ, and who though recognizing the gifts of the Spirit as among the brethren, commended the brethren to the written Word as the means of their comfort and sanctification. But what shall we say in the actual situation of things in our day? Shall we pretend to have the presence of the Spirit when it hath not pleased God to vouchsafe the glorious privilege in this closing term of the dark and Godless times of the Gentiles? Could we have His presence in our midst and be ignorant of the fact? Is it not the part of truth and wisdom to recognize our poverty-stricken condition, and cling with all the more determination to the Holy Oracles as our only hope? Are we not invited to drink at these living waters? Is it not the fact that salvation is predicated on faith in Christ and obedience to his commandments, and not on the enjoyment of the special privilege of the Spirit's supernatural presence and guidance?

I can imagine a rejoicing enemy of the orthodox type seizing hold of these admissions, and using them against our profession, and in favour of the surrounding systems. "See," he might say, "you admit the Spirit of God is not with you; you condemn yourselves. He *is* with *us*. He visits our meetings, waters our operations, strengthens our hearts, converts our hearers, helps our prayers, and gives a blessing to our cause." But assertion is not proof. We must "try the spirits whether they are of God" (1 John 4 : 1). I can only say that if it were true that the Spirit of God was working with the popular systems, I for one should instantly and gladly cease my opposition to them, and seek to condone that opposition, so far as the past is concerned, by humbly asking admission to one of the meanest branches of their operations. But what do we find? First, we find that all these systems equally profess to have the Spirit, and yet differ from one another in their interpretation of the Lord's will in important particulars. Here, at once, is conclusive evidence that they cannot all be guided by one Spirit; because if they were, they would "all speak the same thing, and be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" of divine matters as all the apostles and prophets were. What next do we find? Why, that one and all of them reject with scorn the teaching of the apostles and prophets concerning the kingdom of God and concerning the great doctrine of eternal life. If this is true (and no one really acquainted with the Scriptures will doubt its truth), what escape is there for any of them from the conclusion to which God commands

SEASONS OF COMFORT

us to come, in saying, "If they speak not according to this word, it is because *there is no light in them*"?

There is a spirit, doubtless, at work among the religious bodies around us : a spirit which they "feel." I have felt it myself : a spirit which they sometimes see. I have often seen it myself in bright electric spark before the eye. But it is not the Spirit of God in the primary sense. It is the spirit of man—the life-energy of the blood condensed and applied by a specific action of the mind : a process which is effectual in an assembly in proportion to the number of persons contributing to the supply of the nervous fluid, and in proportion to the harmony of the surrounding conditions, such as matting on the floor, no draughts, no disturbance of the attention by people coming in, etc. Singing greatly helps it, because by the act of singing, the nervous system is stimulated and vital electricity more abundantly given off. Even the Spiritualists find the value of singing in this respect in another and a little darker branch of the same class of misunderstood phenomena. This "spirit" may be accurately defined as "the spirit of the flesh," because it is given off by the flesh in functional excitation. The Spirit of God is in complete contrast ; for the Spirit of God comes direct, as on the day of Pentecost, like "a mighty rushing wind," independent of all conditions ; and when it comes, it causes a man to think and speak in harmony with the Spirit's already recorded utterances. It comes not in our day, for the simple reason that we are living in the days of Israel's down-treading, when all things Gentile are in the ascendant, and when it has pleased God to appoint that there shall be a famine of hearing His words (Amos 8 : 11-12 ; Micah 3 : 6).

It is wise, therefore, though disagreeable, to repudiate the popular claim to the possession and guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is a false claim and a mischievous one. It leads people to look to the wrong direction. It leads them to attach great importance to the changeful moods and tempers of the human mind, which are as useless for spiritual guidance as the flicker of sheet lightning is to the mariner nearing land at night. On the other hand, it leads them practically to make light of and neglect the Bible, which is the only safe and sure guide, like the lighthouse on the dangerous coast, sending its beams athwart the darkness, for the guidance of the approaching ships. In fact, the result of the popular error on this point cannot better be described than in the language of the prophet, concerning Israel's departure from the living God. "They have forsaken the fountain of living waters, and hewed themselves out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." They neglect the true counsel by which God guides His people in the Scriptures of truth, and run after human thoughts, feelings and sentiments which lead away from that counsel. Be it ours to hold fast by the true light which God has placed in the world to lead us from the paths of darkness.

To some it may appear unsuitable to apply the words, "Thou wilt guide me by thy counsel," to the passive relation of things implied in the mere possession of a book that has come from God. It may appear to them that these words require a more active and direct

guidance than this. The answer is, the guidance in the case of David, who wrote the words in question, was more direct than in our case. He could say what we cannot say: "The Spirit of God spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." It could be recorded of him as it cannot be of us, referring to his anointing by Samuel, "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him from that day forward." The "counsel" or advice and direction would, in consequence of this be, in his case, more direct and personal than in our day of drought, when "there is no answer from God." But even in his case, this directness of guidance did not displace from his supreme regard the written guidance which had been vouchsafed to others before his day. On the contrary, David valued and extolled very highly the written testimonies. The Psalms abound with this appreciation. He says in Psa. 19 : 10 : "More to be desired are they (the law, statutes and judgments of the Lord), than gold, yea, much fine gold ; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover, *by them is thy servant warned ; and in keeping of them is great reward.*" His description of the blessed man in the very first Psalm is of one "whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night."

But even if we had not this exemplification of David's devoted appreciation of the law and the testimony, as a lamp and a light and a guidance—that is, supposing David's guidance had been altogether direct and personal by the Spirit (which it was not), and, therefore, out of the category of our experience, we should still be in a position to apply his words to ourselves. We should still be able to say, if diligent students of the Holy Oracles, "Thou wilt guide me by thy counsel." For, when the counsel communicated to David and other servants of God is reduced to writing, does it not then become the property of all who possess the writing? and if we obey it, are we not guided by it? And are we not, in that case, guided by God, who gave the counsel? Unquestionably. We shall realize the force of this if we think what our position would have been in the absence of the Scriptures. We should have been totally in the dark, cut off from all knowledge of God, and, therefore, from all prayer and hope and righteousness. Not knowing His will, we could not have done it. We should have been sunk in deep night, "alienated from the life of God through ignorance in us, because of the blindness of our hearts" (Eph. 4 : 18). With the Scriptures in our hands, it is entirely different. We may, if we suffer ourselves, be guided by His counsel, and, afterwards, received to glory, and this guidance and reception will be all of God.

But some will think, "Surely there is more guidance than this. Surely God does not leave us to the Bible merely. Surely God is not indifferent to those who strive to know His will, and to realize its power in themselves, and to do it. Surely He helps them." The thought is not unscriptural. On the contrary, it is the teaching of the word that if we draw nigh to God, He will draw nigh to us; that if we choose the things wherein He delights—and those things are all embodied in the Bible—He will have His eye upon us and

regard our way ; that if we commit our way to Him, He will direct our steps ; that if we are broken and contrite in heart and tremble at His word, He will look to us and help our infirmities, and succour us in temptation, and supply our needs, and chasten us in our errors, and forgive our sins, and strengthen us in the way of righteousness, and make all things work together for our good. But all this is dependent on our waiting on the word in daily reading and meditation. He hath magnified His word above all His name. He has appointed it as the means of our sanctification, the place of our meeting with Him. Honouring the word we honour Him. Despising the word we despise Him ; and it is written, "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

As A Thief In The Night

The second appearing of the Lord.—The coming of every good.—Dead brethren.—Times and seasons.—The day of the Lord.—Comes unexpectedly.—“As a snare.”—“As a thief.”—Upon whom?—Not upon the brethren of Christ.—The world.—A view all the world repudiates with scorn.—In danger of benumbing us.—The day of the Lord’s approach.—Recognizable in the public affairs of the world.—Why cannot the world see the signs?—The signs gradual ; resemble the movements of the starry universe.—The scoffer cannot discern.—“Peace and safety” the cry to the last.—“Sudden destruction” will change the face of the world.—Terrible beyond all human experience.—Not war merely.—Supernatural visitations.—The Egyptian deliverance.—The dividing of the Red Sea.—The earth opening her mouth.—The flashing forth of fire.—Fiery serpents.—The dividing of the Jordan.—The walls of Jericho.—Atmospheric means of destruction.—To the sons of God a welcome and long-looked-for deliverance.

THAT which is good, everyone desires to obtain quickly. The second appearing of the Lord from heaven involves the coming of every good that it is possible for the heart of man to conceive, and good that it is not possible for the heart of man to conceive. Therefore those who are “looking for him” and “love his appearing,” join naturally in the prayer of John, “Lord Jesus, come quickly.”

We have before us this morning a part of the letters of our beloved brother Paul, which brings this matter before us in a specially interesting and instructive form. To the Thessalonians he had written concerning the dead brethren. The consolation was that the dead would lose nothing by falling asleep, but that on the contrary, they would be the first to be regarded by the Lord at his coming, when together with the living, they would be glorified in his presence. “Wherefore,” says he, “comfort one another with these words.” And comforting words they were. But the question of the time

for this glorious release naturally came up ; as if the brethren had said, “ We rejoice in the consolation—but oh ! when will it come ? ” Paul’s answer is, “ But of the times and the seasons *ye have no need* that I write unto you.” In this, there was probably a deeper meaning than Paul himself was aware of, for as with the prophets (1 Pet. 1 : 11), so, doubtless, with the apostles, the Spirit gave them utterance of things of which they did not apprehend the full import. There was a special sense in which the brethren had no need to be informed on the question of times and seasons. There was the sense expressed by Christ himself when, on the same subject, he said to the apostles, “ It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power ” (Acts 1 : 7). It was not for them : it would have been of no use to them. It would have been worse than of no use : it would have burdened and perhaps discouraged them, to know that nearly two thousand years lay between them and the glory to be revealed.

The reason, however, Paul gives for there being no need why he should write to them on the subject of times and seasons, is the state of their knowledge on certain features of the case. “ *Yourselves know perfectly* that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child ; and they shall not escape.” That is, when the time should arrive for the coming of this day of the Lord, which should be characterized by the resurrection of the dead as well as judgment upon the ungodly, it would come unexpectedly ; it would come as a thief comes—the very phrase used by Jesus himself concerning his coming under the sixth vial : “ Behold, I come as a thief ” (Rev. 16 : 15). To use another expression of his (Luke 21 : 35) “ as a snare,” it would come. A creature taken in a snare is taken unexpectedly ; it is unaware of the very existence of the snare a moment before. One moment it is free, thinking only of the question of food ; the next, it is in a trap, from which there is no escape. The idea of unlooked-for suddenness is, therefore, associated with the arrival of the day of God. The same idea is conveyed by the phrase “ as a thief.” The thief steals into the house without notice ; nothing is more foreign to the thoughts of the inmates. If they had any idea of a visit from a thief, they would be on the watch and not suffer the house to be broken into ; but any token of his approach is the last thing a thief allows.

Upon whom, however, is it that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night ? Is it upon the brethren of Christ ? By no means. They are of those of whom Jesus, in connection with the very intimation of his thieflike coming, says : “ Blessed is he that *watcheth.*” Paul expressly says, in the chapter under consideration (1 Thess. 5 : 4), “ Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.” It is to “ them that look for him ” that Jesus “ appears the second time, without sin, unto salvation ” (Heb. 9 : 28). Not upon the *brethren* of Christ, then, but upon the world at large, the day of the Lord, will come as a thief in the night.

It is profitable for us to remember this. We see the world busy from year to year, with its public and private affairs, conducted with an air of vast importance. They follow pleasure and minister to their own glory, and neglect God, apparently with perfect impunity. The things of God figure very small in the presence of their pomp and their display. Nothing appears so absolutely trashy as the hope of Israel, and nothing so ignoble as a stickling for the commandments and ordinances of God. In such a situation, we are apt to be victimized by the impressions of the moment. We are apt to doubt our own reading of the word. We are liable, almost unconsciously, to feel as if there must be something wrong in an attitude which all the world despises ; in a view of things which all the world repudiates with scorn ; in expectations which even the learned, and the wise and renowned, dismiss as the raw conceptions of half-enlightenment, or something worse. The slow, constant action on the mind of this spectacle of unbelief or indifference on the part of Society at large—rich and poor, great and small, learned and ignorant, cultivated and ill-bred—to the most glorious facts of the gospel, is in danger of benumbing us, and making us feel, contrary to the facts and the evidence, that there is something wrong in our position. It is profitable to remember that the Spirit of God has forewarned us, that the approach of the day of the Lord would find the world in this state : that the day would come upon them as a thief, and would bring sudden destruction upon them.

It may be wondered how the day of the Lord can be said to come as a thief, seeing that its approach has been so long proclaimed beforehand, and seeing there are so many signs of it recognizable in the public affairs of the world. The wonder will cease if it be remembered that it is only to those who are indifferent to that proclamation and ignorant of those signs, that it is said to come as a thief. To those who believe and watch, we have already seen, it will not come as a thief, but rather as an expected and much desired friend. Why cannot the world see the signs ? Because those signs are communicated in a form that can only be apprehended by childlike and patient persevering study. It was said to Daniel, concerning them : "The wise shall understand, but none of the wicked shall understand" (Dan. 12 : 10). The same idea was indicated to John, in the words : "Here is *wisdom* : let *him that hath understanding* count the number of the beast" (Rev. 13 : 18). Now, the world lacks the very beginning of wisdom, the fear of God ; and, therefore, can never obtain access to secrets accessible only to a state of mind of which that fear is the very first characteristic. The world aims at its own gratification and glory ; and, therefore, the secrets of God are hid from it. "His secret is with the righteous." "The scorner seeketh wisdom," we are told, "and findeth it not : but knowledge is easy to him that understandeth" (Prov. 14 : 6).

Another reason why the world cannot see the signs, or, rather, another aspect of the same reason, is that the signs themselves, when understood, are so gradual in their development that it requires the patience of a loving and affectionate watch to be able to discern

them. They do not flash like a rocket before our vision : they are not like the flaming meteor, rushing across the sky, and dazzling all our eyes by its brightness ; they are not even like the slow-moving comet, spread out in the heavens in definite and luminous form. They rather resemble the stately and unsensational movements of the starry universe, from which the dates of eclipses are deduced. They are movements in the political heavens correspondent with the indications of the prophetic word, telling us of the approach, not of an eclipse, but of a sunrising which is to bring healing to the world. The scoffer cannot discern these movements, even though he may be acquainted with the facts of which they consist. He laughs at the expectation of the saint, and says, "Where is the promise of his coming ?" for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." They join with the scoffers of ancient days in Israel (for such there were), who said, "Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it : and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it" (Isa. 5 : 19). The day that is coming will justify the faith and hope of the righteous, and overwhelm the despisers of the word with consternation.

Paul's words teach us that "peace and safety" will be the cry to the last, and that the actual arrival of the day of the Lord will find the people with these words in their mouth. This is also very useful to know. It helps us to endure the placid indifference and absolute stolidity with which the whole subject of the purpose of God is regarded in the earth. The signs indicative of the approach of the day of the Lord are abroad. Yet the people say, "Oh, there have always been wars." You point to the Eastern Question and its terrible complications ; and they say, "Oh, it will be settled by and by. This Eastern Question : this Roman question : all these questions will be arranged in due course of politics—without war perhaps—after war, certainly. They are mere matters of difference between nations, such as there have always been, which will be settled somehow, as time rolls on, without interfering greatly with the general stability of human affairs. Peace and safety are the rule : war the exception : and war only affects a few after all." To have the Word of God smothered under bushels of easy-going unbelieving talk of this sort is trying in more ways than one ; but it will be less trying if we remember that it is revealed that "peace and safety" is to be the pleasant speech which men will ring in each other's ears up to the very crisis of that appointed "sudden destruction" which will change the face of the world.

This "sudden destruction" comprehends a great deal. It comprises all the details of the terrible convulsion by which the present system of things is to be overthrown in judgment, and a new heaven and new earth established wherein dwelleth righteousness. These details will be terrible beyond all human experience. The languid interest with which people regard the sure word of prophecy will undergo a wonderful change when they come to pass. There will be a fearful anxiety to understand when the judgments of God

SEASONS OF COMFORT

begin to reverberate throughout the world. The cry of "peace and safety" will cease when destruction walks at noon-day, and myriads perish by the wrath of David's Son, which, kindled but a little, will be terrible to those who, with the Bible in their hands, know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. We must remember that it is not war merely that will press home upon the world the fact that "the hour of His judgment is come." War is an element, but it is the war of the great day of God Almighty, who brings into play means and agencies of destruction unknown to what we may call merely providential wars—wars in which God makes use of one nation against another nation, in a perfectly natural war. The power put forth in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt illustrates the nature of the judgments by which, in addition to war, the inhabitants of the earth will be taught righteousness. Egypt, destroyed by a succession of supernatural visitations, may be taken to represent the world in the crisis when it is to be "dashed to pieces like a potter's vessel." We are justified in entertaining this view from the fact testified, that when the Lord goes forth to fight against those nations, He is to fight against them "*as when he fought in the day of battle*" (Zech. 14 : 3). This historic allusion is identified with the Egyptian deliverance in the words of Micah : "According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him (Israel) marvellous things. The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might." When we refer to the account of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, what do we find? We find that not only did Israel fight as an instrumental means in the case, but that God wrought visibly and powerfully with them, "The Lord cast down great stones from heaven upon them (the Amorites) unto Azekah, and they died : *they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword*" (Joshua 10 : 11). Can we forget, also, the dividing of the Red Sea to let Israel through, in which same divided sea, returning to her strength, the Egyptians found their grave? Can we forget the earth opening her mouth and engulfing the rebellious company of Korah? the flashing forth of fire in the consumption of their sympathizers in the congregation? or the attack on the camp by fiery serpents—the messengers of Jehovah's anger? Can we forget the dividing of the Jordan, or the downfall of the walls of Jericho before the innocent blast of rams' horns? No marvel that the nations of Canaan fainted in their hearts at the report of the onward march of this terribly formidable foe. These wonderful works are to be repeated in the earth on a larger scale. Israel is Jehovah's battle-axe and weapons of war with which He will break in pieces the nations and destroy kingdoms in the day of His anger (Jer. 51 : 20). Their leader is Emmanuel—the child born, the son given, the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father—because of which, the war waged by Israel against the nations, will be distinguished from all ordinary wars. So it is written : "Every battle of the warrior is with confused noise, and garments rolled in blood ; *but this shall be with burning and fuel of fire.* For unto us a child is born," etc. (Isa. 9 : 5). The

angels, inferior to Jesus, were able to overwhelm Sodom and Gomorrah with fire and brimstone out of heaven. He is to be "revealed from heaven . . . in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come," etc. (2 Thess. 1 : 7-9). The very first blow is marked by the employment of supernatural atmospheric means of destruction: "I will plead against him with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone" (Ezek. 38 : 22). See also Zech. 14 : 12. "Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongues shall consume away in their mouth." These statements refer to the first great act of judgment by which the land of Israel will be cleared of the enemy. We learn, however, that the same destructive manifestation of power is to be extended afterwards to the earth generally, for the purpose of making the fear of God universal. "I will send a fire on Magog, and among them that dwell carelessly in the isles; and they shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezek. 39 : 6). "He will plead with all flesh: he will give them that are wicked to the sword . . . The slain of the Lord shall be at that day from one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried: they shall be dung upon the ground" (Jer. 25 : 31-33). "When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness."

The cry of "peace and safety"—the universal persistence in the habit of interpreting public events on purely natural principles, to the exclusion of the purpose of God from all recognition, will not delay for a single hour the advent of the terrible destruction from the Almighty; it will come whether men sleep or wake; neglect or consider. In relation to the world it will come suddenly. To the sons of God, it will come as a welcome and long-looked-for deliverance. Ye are not in darkness, that that day should come upon you as a thief. Be strong, be vigilant. Our neighbours may laugh at our confidence and pity the fanaticism, as they regard it, that looks for these things; but, in truth, they themselves are the objects of true pity. They are blind to what God has purposed and what God has revealed, and will be the victims of a helpless terror when the long-sleeping but approaching tempest of divine vengeance breaks forth upon the world, and sweeps away for ever the whole system of godless comfort in which men repose. Our single anxiety, while the vision yet carries, ought to be to keep ourselves apart from the universal un wisdom, not sleeping as do others, but keeping our eyes open to the solemn though invisible facts of the situation; that when they are no longer invisible, but the patent, terror-striking events of the hour, we may have a refuge in the haven of protection from which, after the storm, the saints will issue forth to bless the world with peace.

The World Asleep

The arrival of the day of the Lord.—A revolution unprecedented and awful.—The practical application.—Let us not sleep as do others.—Not literal sleep.—A sleeping man and the midnight burglar.—Universal sleep prevails.—Men oblivious to the real facts of life.—A thief about to break into the house.—The facts of our situation.—The natural man liable to forget them.—The daily reading of the Scripture.—Taking care to keep awake.—Avoid the things that tend to draw to slumber.—“Weights” to be “laid aside.”—Novel-reading abandoned.—Companions.—Pleasures.—Pursuits.—Habits.—Things to be avoided.—The world’s maxims.—Rely for guidance on the word only.—Course of life “acceptable unto the Lord.”—A rule of judgment unrecognized in the world.—Great peace not a path of roses.—The path of probation a path of thorns.—Hard actual experience.—Time of temptation.—Soon the fight will be over.—The consolation.

WE had recently to consider what is involved in the declaration of Paul that the arrival of the day of the Lord will be preceded by a cry of peace and safety ; and that while this comforting cry is in full voice throughout the world, sudden destruction will descend like a whirlwind upon the whole fabric of human society, and lay it in ruins for the manifestation of the righteous judgment of God, and to pave the way for the new order of things, styled new heavens and new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. On the present occasion we shall do well to realize what our attitude ought to be in the prospect of a revolution so unprecedented and so awful.

You will find that Paul instantly introduces this topic after speaking of the day that cometh as a thief. This is a feature of all the epistles—the practical application of the facts introduced. It is, more or less, a characteristic of the entire Scriptures. Subjects are never treated as matters of theoretical interest. Mere knowledge is never placed high. On the contrary, it is disparaged. Knowledge in this sense is said to “puff up” (1 Cor. 8 : 1). It is taught that a man may understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and yet be “nothing” (1 Cor. 13 : 2). It is the right use of correct knowledge that is the burden of all Scriptural exhortations to wisdom. The tendency in connection with the truth in our day to exalt knowledge over the love of God and His service, is due merely to the popular extreme in the opposite direction from which we have all more or less suffered. It is difficult, in the presence of the universal revolt against the knowledge that brings salvation, to exercise that wisdom which, while holding fast the truth as the foundation, aims to build on that foundation the fabric of holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. Yet it is this at which we must constantly aim. A constant study of Paul’s Epistles will help us.

In the case in question, having spoken of the coming day and its thief-like advent, he says, “Therefore let us not sleep, *as do others* ;

but let us watch and be sober." Here is something to be avoided that is common ; something to cultivate that is rare. What are we to understand by this sleep which is the common habit of " others " ? It is important we should know, for how otherwise shall we know how to steer clear of it ? Of course it does not mean literal sleep, for taking of rest in natural sleep is good and necessary, and was done by the Lord himself. Paul here means sleep in a figurative sense. Jesus used sleep in this sense when speaking on the same subject. He said, " The Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore . . . lest coming suddenly, he find you *sleeping* " (Mark 13 : 34).

What is this sleep ? We see it in the relation of a sleeping man to the midnight visit of the burglar, from which the figure is derived. He is totally unconscious of what is going on. He is unaware of the actual situation of things. He thinks in his dreams, it may be, that he is in a palace, surrounded with pleasant company at a splendid feast, listening to the strains of music. His feelings are highly soothed as he contemplates the illusions of his wandering imagination. He would resent any attempt to awaken him. He prefers to cling to his pleasing fancies ; and while he slumbers and lingers in the fairyland of his deceptive brain, the burglar proceeds with his fell work, and the man awakes at last to find his money all gone. Had he been awake, the calamity would have been avoided ; but he was asleep, and the thief came.

Now, as Paul observes. " They who sleep sleep in the night." He adds, " Let us who are *of the day* be sober." Here we have the idea suggested by the figure of sleep further carried out. There is a day and a night to be considered. The day, we are told, is at hand, but not yet arrived. It is the day of Christ, introduced by him as the rising sun. In his absence it is night. The night, we are told, is far spent, but still lingers ; and because it is night, an almost universal sleep prevails in which men are oblivious to the real facts of life, unconscious of the actual situation, and dreaming their time away with thoughts and pleasures and aims that are all illusions at the root, and will disappear before the dawn of the day of Christ as completely as the dreams of the sleeper fly before the rising of the sun. There is one about to break into the house of these dreamers, even Christ, who comes to take all things to himself ; but they are unaware of the fact. They prefer their dreams. They will awake to find desolation.

Paul says we are not to " sleep, as do others." What is this but saying that we are to keep the facts of our situation in constant memory ? These facts are the truth. They are facts that the natural man is most liable to " let slip." That the earth is the Lord's ; that He has made it for his pleasure ; that this pleasure principally consists in the enlightened appreciation and praise and faithful obedience of man ; that man has departed from this obedience ; that he is consequently under the dominion of evil and death ; that God has purposed and is carrying out a plan of remedy which, while

rescuing us, will exalt his own praise ; that this purpose centres in Christ who was born, proved, crucified, and raised from the dead one thousand eight hundred years ago ; that he is now above at the Father's right hand as a priest over his own house, with actual results even now ; that he is coming at the appointed time to take possession of all the kingdoms of men, and to judge his house and assign them a place in the earth, his inheritance, or to reject them altogether, " according as their works shall be " ; that, meanwhile, that house consists of those who hold fast the confidence and rejoicing in this hope to the end ; that they are now a priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices in showing forth the praise of Him who has called them ; that they are strangers and sojourners in the earth at present, as all the fathers were ; that while they are in the world they are not to be of the world, but to accept the commandments of Christ as the unvarying rule of their lives, walking as children of the light in denying all ungodliness, and living soberly, righteously and godly in the present evil world. I say there is nothing that the natural man is more liable to forget than that all these things are so. The world around us is absolutely unbelieving—dead asleep. A few have their sleep disturbed, but do not wake up. They have the truth brought to their notice, and give it a momentary attention, but it lays no hold of them in a lasting way. Some wake up, but go to sleep again. They are interested in the truth for a while, but gradually let other things engage their attention and interest. A few wake clear up, and remain in possession of their faculties, but even these have to make an effort to keep awake. The air is full of narcotic fumes, so to speak, which can only be neutralized by the constant application of the antidote provided by the Lord of the house. Neglect the antidote, and sleep will assuredly overcome us. That antidote is to be found in the word of God, and in what it requires at our hands—prayer and assembly with the saints.

Therefore, the way practically to obey the exhortation of Paul, " not to sleep as do others," is to take those means that will keep us awake. The man who neglects the daily reading of the Scripture is not taking those means. He is deceiving himself. He thinks he can keep awake by a mere effort of the will. He thinks as he knows the truth it is unnecessary for him to trouble himself with the reading of the word. He forgets first, that no man can ever know the truth thoroughly by a mere study of first principles at the beginning, in consequence of the diffuse and diversified form in which it has been divinely communicated, and in consequence of the natural antagonism between human thoughts and divine thoughts ; and secondly, he forgets that even if we could know the truth thoroughly at the start, the mind quickly loses the knowledge it has acquired, so far as its power is concerned, especially because it is the knowledge of God which the mind is so prone to throw off rather than to retain. " Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." This is the declaration of Jesus, and all men will find it true at last on one side or other. " Bread alone," will only give us the natural energy of mind and body which, after a

while, will pass away never to return. The word which God has spoken, incorporated now into the mental man by daily reading and meditation, will even now, while it sanctifies us to God, impart a healthful nobility and joy, and in the end ensure a participation in that length of days, for ever and ever, which the Father gave to Jesus in answer to His prayer (Psa. 21 : 4).

While taking care to use the means to keep awake, it is necessary to avoid the things that tend to draw us into the universal slumber. On this head, there are books not to be read, companions not to be kept company with, pleasures not to be followed, pursuits not to be engaged in, habits not to be practised, objects not to be aimed at. There are "weights" to be "laid aside"—to use another of Paul's figures when comparing the calling in Christ to a race. Every earnest man will be able to recognize these for himself. They are discernible by the simple test of whether they interfere or not with the growth of Christ dwelling in our heart by faith. By this test, novel-reading will be abandoned. There is no more powerful spiritual sleeping draught than this. It conjures a fictitious picture before the mind. It invests human life with a beauty that does not exist in fact, and teaches men to be interested in trifles, and to be interested even in important things and in men from the wrong point of view. It excludes God from sight, draws a veil over real wisdom, and hides the glory to be revealed. The Bible appears a very dull object to the eyes of man or woman just turned from the dazzle of brilliant story-telling. So companions who know not God, and have consequently no sympathy with divine objects, motives, and prospects of life; pleasures that excite a narrow-minded emulation, or bring us into friendly relation with godless people; pursuits in politics or science that would give us an interest in the property of the present order of things, or in other directions; pursuits that have an ill-savour, or exact too much of our time and energy; habits that identify us with the unholy, debase the mental powers, defile nature, or make holiness a dim idea; objects which, in the process of their attainment, would require us to sacrifice all opportunities of the service of Christ, or in their realization would expose us to a dangerous fellowship with the world (such as aiming to be wealthy)—all these are things to be avoided, and that will be avoided, by those who have earnestly set their faces for the kingdom of God. Such are not to be scared away from the path of wisdom by outcries which have their origin elsewhere. We have to remember that the world at large have not only forgotten the theory of the truth, but that they have never realized to what it is that men are called when they are called to be sons of God, and brethren of Christ, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. From this unenlightened world most brethren have but recently come. Consequently they are liable to bring the world's maxims with them. Casting about for the right one, the only safe plan is to rely for guidance on the word only. Brethren are only trustworthy in so far as they echo its sentiments and principles. If they complain of the way of godliness being narrow, or the standard high, they complain against the word. If the way is narrow, and the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

standard high, it is God who has made them so, and it would be madness in us to tamper with them while professing to accept them.

Taking care, then, to use the means of keeping awake, and to avoid the causes of that sleep which holds the children of the night in deadly thrall, we shall attain to a different condition of life from that which is common to the world, and which was common to us all in the days of our darkness—different as to our state of mind, and, therefore, as to the purpose for which we live. Paul gives frequent and forcible expression to this difference in various forms in his Epistles. They may all be taken as comprised in his saying to the Ephesians, "Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord : *walk as children of light* . . . proving (or realizing in yourselves) what is *acceptable unto the Lord*." The question with us will be, what state of mind, what course of life is "acceptable unto the Lord." This is a rule of judgment totally unrecognized in the world. The recognition of it constitutes the difference between a sinner and a saint. It will not be difficult to apply the rule if we are diligent readers of the word of truth, for that which is acceptable to him is made very plain there (and nowhere else can we learn this). Paul is a great instructor in the matter—"a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity"—whose word we are enjoined to receive as "the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14 : 37). It is a phrase he makes frequent use of. It is profitable to ponder the things which he says are "acceptable to God." Righteousness, peace, *joy in the Holy Spirit*, are in the category. He says (Rom. 14 : 18), "He that in these things serveth Christ is *acceptable to God*." To the Philippians he gratefully acknowledged their ministration to him in temporal things. "I am full," he says, "having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice *acceptable, well-pleasing to God*" (Phil. 4 : 18). Of the subject of requiting parents, by looking after them in their old age, he says "that it is good and *acceptable before God*" (1 Tim. 5 : 4). Of "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks" he says "this is good and *acceptable* in the sight of God our Saviour" (1 Tim. 2 : 3). Again he exhorts brethren "to present their bodies as *living sacrifices*," which he says are "holy, *acceptable to God*" (Rom. 12 : 1). Peter makes use of the same phrases in reference to two other matters : first, "the offering up of spiritual sacrifices, *acceptable to God* by Jesus Christ," and secondly, "when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently : this is *acceptable with God*" (1 Pet. 2 : 5, 20). Examination will discover numerous other cases in which, though the same phrase is not employed, the same idea is expressed, such as when it is plainly said, "with such sacrifices (doing good and communicating—giving), God is well pleased" (Heb. 13 : 16).

A perseverance in the course of life that is "acceptable to God" will bring great peace when pursued with a pure regard to His approbation. It will not, however, be found a path of roses. While toward God there will be peace, towards man there will be much to mortify and perturb—much to endure in the way of present sacrifice and crucifixion of feeling. The path of probation is purposely a

path of thorns. Hence the words of Paul, "Ye have *need of patience*, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Heb. 10 : 36). See also Peter : . . . "Salvation (is) ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are *in heaviness through manifold temptations* : that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1 : 5-7). The accepted of God in all past ages have exemplified this rule. "Take, my brethren, the prophets," says James, "for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience." Of the congregation of the chosen as a whole, it was said to John when he saw them glorified in vision and asked who they were, "These are they who came out of great tribulation," reminding us of Paul's words to the churches among whom he went to strengthen them in a season of great trouble : "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

Let us not be discouraged, then, if we find our present lot a bitter one because of our submission to the will of God. We require to rally ourselves on this point. It is pleasant enough to talk about tribulation preparing us for the Kingdom of God ; but it is hard in the actual experience. The heart sometimes grows sick. The waters come into the soul, and the spirit is overwhelmed. Let us beware of straying from the path for ease. Let us remember the words of Christ concerning some that "in time of temptation fall away." Let us not lay down the cross because it is heavy. Christ asked us to take it up and carry it. Let us, when hardly beset, follow the example of David, who says, "From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee, when my heart is overwhelmed." This is what James exhorts, "Is any among you afflicted, let him pray." It is what Jesus himself says. "Men ought always to pray, and not to faint." "Watch and pray, lest ye enter into (fall a victim to) temptation." Resorting thus, in our trouble, to the Rock that is higher than ourselves, we shall be given a strength that will enable us to endure, and a help that will open a way of escape that we be not tempted above that we are able to bear.

And soon the fight will be over, and the race run ; and who shall tell the consolation that awaits the victory of "him that overcometh" ? Christ will confess him, the angels will rejoice with him, and a multitude of true brethren will give thanks to God for his triumph. Glory will rest upon him, honour will be poured upon him, and life granted him for length of endless days. A crown will be placed upon his head ; the sceptre of righteous rule in his hands ; and an exhaustless bounty of blessing placed at his command for those whom his iron rod shall rule. In the strength of immortal vigour, and the joy of the mantling spirit, and the possession of all divine excellence, he will forget the sorrows of this age of sin except as the background of his eternal joy ; and will give thanks to God for evermore that he was privileged to know and do the will of God in the day of his dishonour and shame.

Signs Of The Morning

Heavy tidings for Zion.—Terrible forewarnings and declaration of coming evil.—All accomplished.—The end of Zion's desolation.—Sigh and cry for the day of promise.—Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.—Her night long and dark.—Speechless on the ground.—The time of deliverance is at hand.—Watching the horizon.—The storms of eastern conflict.—The midnight sky cleared.—Britain's shadow over Jehovah's land.—The struggling dawn of Israel's coming day of glory.—The British Protectorate.—A partial gathering of Israel.—The Lord's first public appearance in the affairs of the world.—The unmistakable tokens that he is at the door.—The setting of his house in order by judgment.—Joy or fear, according as we have been living.—There is yet time.

THEY were heavy tidings for Zion that were proclaimed by Jeremiah in the portion read from his prophecies this morning : " A voice declareth from Dan, and publisheth affliction from Mount Ephraim. Make ye mention to the nations ; behold, publish against Jerusalem, that watchers come from a far country, and give out their voices against the cities of Judah. As keepers of a field are they against her round about ; because she hath been rebellious against me, saith the Lord. Thy ways and thy doings have procured these things unto thee : this is thy wickedness, because it is bitter, because it reacheth unto thine heart . . . Thou hast heard, O my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. Destruction upon destruction is cried ; for the whole land is spoiled. . . . My people is foolish, they have not known me ; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding : they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge." " The lion is come up from his thicket, and the destroyer of the Gentiles is on his way ; he is gone forth from his place to make thy land desolate ; and thy cities shall be laid waste without an inhabitant" (Jer. 4 : 15-22, 7).

The prophets are full of such terrible forewarnings and declarations of coming evil. The judgments foretold have all been accomplished, and for long dreary centuries, the world has been witness of the desolation that has reigned in a land once fertile and full of human activity and joy ; and a beholder and inflicter of the ignominy that has for ages been the portion of an exiled race, once the honoured inhabitants of the Lord's land.

In this we are interested as words cannot express. Assembled this morning as the children of Zion (for we are such by adoption, though not of Jewish blood), to call to remembrance the death of Zion's king, it is part of our joy to re-contemplate the hope that God has given us concerning the end of Zion's desolation, at His manifestation in power and great glory. They are no vain words that we sing when we say, " The Lord shall comfort Zion : he will comfort all her waste places ; he will make her wilderness like

Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody." Such is the declaration of the word of inspiration. Jehovah, who hath established the desolation, will bring to pass revival and prosperity and the gladness. So He hath promised, as we know. "He hath torn, and he will heal us: he hath smitten, and he will bind us up" (Hos. 6 : 1). "In my wrath I smote thee, but in my favour have I had mercy on thee" (Isa. 60 : 10). "He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock" (Jer. 31 : 10). "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer" (Isa. 54 : 7, 8).

The desolation of Israel seems a small thing in the estimation of the children of the present world. They do not realize what glories were involved in the Mosaic constitution which God gave to Israel. They do not know the wretchedness that results to the human race from the absence of divine government. They cannot appreciate the unutterable goodness that will come to all people with the rebuilding of the house of David, and the extension of its shadowing power to every country under heaven. The truth, if we have learnt it in its fulness, has taught us all these things, and, therefore, leads us to sigh and cry for the day of promise, when the Lord's land will no longer be desolate; when Jehovah's people will no longer be wanderers in the earth, when the nations of the world will no longer walk after the imagination of their evil hearts, but will rejoice in the law that will go forth to the ends of the earth from David's Son, enthroned in glorified Zion. To such as thus mourn for Jerusalem, the words are addressed: "Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, *all ye that mourn for her*: that ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. For thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the Gentiles like a flowing stream: then shall ye suck, ye shall be borne upon her sides, and be dandled upon her knees. As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem" (Isa. 66 : 10-13). Is it a wonder that we should "pray for the peace of Jerusalem"? How can we, with the knowledge of what God has purposed concerning her, be interested in any other prosperity than the prosperity of her palaces in which God is known for a refuge? It is something far higher than Jewish patriotism that enables us to use the language of *Psa. 137*: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy."

Her night has been long and dark and bitter. She has "drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his fury. She has drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling, and wrung them out" (Isa. 51 : 17). She lies speechless on the ground. But there is an end to her affliction.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Jehovah commanded his servant Isaiah to speak comfortably to Jerusalem and to cry unto her, that her warfare should be accomplished, her iniquities pardoned, when she should have received of the hand of the Lord enough for all her sins (Isa. 40 : 1). Again, saith he. "Hear now this, thou afflicted, and drunken, but not with wine . . . Behold, I have taken out of thine hand the cup of trembling, even the dregs of the cup of my fury ; thou shalt no more drink it again : but I will put it into the hand of them that afflict thee." How long she should have to suffer was not at that time revealed. Jesus referred to the period of her affliction, saying she should be "trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles should be fulfilled" (Luke 21 : 24). The duration of these times of downtreading, characterized also by Gentile ascendancy, was approximately foreshown to Daniel and John. By the light of what was revealed to them, we are enabled to be assured that the time of deliverance is at hand—nay, that the time definitely appointed for desolation, is in the past.

In this conviction, we have been watching the horizon of Zion's night for a long time for signs of the coming dawn. We have not watched in vain. For a long time there has been a little light on the sky-line, very faint and dull, to be sure ; but still distinguishable from the inky-black overhead. Now and then, there has been a visible increase in this faint light, till, with the Montefiore scheme, it began to amount to a streak. This, however, seemed to fade away before the storms of Eastern conflict. Great clouds covered the horizon altogether from sight. The scheme was in abeyance, and the power of the desolator of the land seemed for a moment, with the Russian reverses at Zewin and Plevna (in Asia and Europe), likely to be strengthened, and the dawn of hope to be postponed. The storm at last spent itself. The lightnings ceased to rage ; the torrents abated their downpour ; with the Berlin Congress, the midnight sky has cleared, and lo ! the horizon is lighted up as it has never been lit before.

Britain has thrown her shadow over Jehovah's land. The Turkish desolator is no longer at liberty to work his will. Though nominally he is still the sovereign of the realm, a new power is blended with his which insists upon, and will compel, order, security, tranquillity, and development in the lands desolate for generations. The way is, then, clear for the preliminary work of Israel's reviving, and already the process, arrested by war, is resumed. You may have read in the *Jewish Chronicle* that the Montefiore committee has issued orders to the agent appointed to represent it at Jerusalem to proceed to the Holy Land, after previously visiting London, to consult with regard to the steps to be taken for the purchase of land, and the erection of houses for agricultural and industrial occupation by the Jews. You may have read that the Jews regard this English Protectorate—made real by the occupation of the Bible island of Cyprus—as equivalent to the proclamation of Cyrus—"Who is there among you of all his people ? The Lord his God be with him, and let him go up." You may have read that they expect that the Holy Land,

under this protectorate, will become a harbour of refuge to the thousands of Israel throughout the world, whose yearnings are directed to the land of their fathers, but whom, hitherto, Turkish rapacity and Greek and Latin fanaticism have deterred from directing their steps thither.

What is all this but the struggling dawn of Israel's coming day of glory? It is what we have been looking for, for years and years. It is, in fact, the last item of the long list of latter-day signs which have all, one by one, been gradually realized. A brother thus speaks of it in a recent letter :—" It gives more real satisfaction and solid comfort than any political event that I can remember for the last twelve years. It is a fitting sequel to the purchase of the Suez Canal shares, and like it, is unaccompanied with the horrors of war. The Austro-Prussian war was interesting for the time being ; but its full object was not immediately apparent. It is true that it led to a breach with the Papacy, but we had to wait until 1870-71 to see that it was necessary, in order to strengthen Prussia for the overthrow of the French Empire and the withdrawal of her troops from Rome. In our anxious voyage, these were like islands in the ocean, indicating that we were getting nearer to the mainland ; and the events of the Russo-Turkish war have been like a series of startling rockets sent from the unseen shore ; but, by the English occupation of Cyprus and Protectorate over Asiatic Turkey, we are positively brought within sight of land. The distance between it and us is still uncertain—for measurement by the eye across water surface is generally deceptive. But we now know that the beacons and headlands are nearly all passed, and that, consequently, there is but little more to do in looking at these marine milestones, the best occupation being the gathering together and packing of those things necessary for disembarkation when the harbour is reached. Woe unto those who are unable to find all that is required to land on the shore of salvation, or who are indifferent to the rules of the landing stage ! Too late ! too late ! will then be their only reception. I pray that we may be spared such a fate."

The British-Protectorate sign is the one that immediately precedes the reappearance of Christ in the earth. You do not require that I should, on the present occasion, show the Scriptural evidence of this. You are well acquainted with it. You know it is revealed that, first, before the unbaring of Jehovah's arm in judgment upon the nations of the earth, there would be a partial gathering of Israel to their land, effected by natural means, and under the protecting shadow of the Merchant and Lion power of Britain's shadowing wings. You know that it is against this infant, protected, and rapidly prospering colony, that the Russian Gog descends like a storm in his conflict with the merchants of Tarshish ; you know that the Russian Gog triumphs in this invasion, and that it is when he is in the full flood-tide of victory that the Lord makes his first public appearance in the affairs of the world, miraculously overthrowing the power of the invader, driving the marauding hosts out of the country, and setting up again the kingdom of David on the long-desolate moun-

SEASONS OF COMFORT

tains of Judah. When he thus appears you know that the saints are with him. From this you know that they must have joined him in the preceding interval—that is, the interval between the beginning of the partial restoration of Israel and the stormy downrush of Gog to overthrow the land. Because that interval has now in a manner begun, you are looking at any time for the summons to depart and meet the Lord. How long that interval will be we have no means of knowing. Whether the Lord will come this year or next, or even in five years, or even let us say in ten, we know not. But it is cheering to our hearts to see the unmistakable tokens that he is at the door. Beware of the folly of saying, “My Lord delayeth coming.” He may not delay longer. We may not see the year out. We have no guide as to the length of time to be occupied by the Lord in the setting of his house in order by judgment. There are millions to be judged, and all must give account. After the account and the separation of the two classes—the accepted and the rejected—there may be a season of communion between the Lord and his glorified brethren, in the presence of the thousands of angels who accompany him at his return. All this may require time enough to necessitate an immediate commencement. Dr. Thomas’ suggestion may prove correct—that the work of the partial restoration of the Jews and the work of judging the house of Christ in the recesses of Teman, are operations that may go on together. If so, the establishment of an English Protectorate in Asia Minor, and the beginning of the work of Jewish revival in the Holy Land, say to us with a plainness never before illustrated : “Behold, the Judge standeth at the door.”

It is a juncture of affairs that will affect us with joy or fear, according as we have been living in harmony or otherwise with the calling to which, by the Gospel, we have been called. If we have consented to accept the part of strangers and sojourners with Christ, estimating and conducting ourselves as his stewards, making his commandments the rule of our lives, bearing testimony to him, and occupying in his service, in the midst of a world that denies him and dishonours God, all the while fostering our affections for the glorious hope that will be realized in his appearing, then we shall naturally conform to Christ’s own suggestion : seeing these things, we shall “lift up our heads, for our redemption draweth nigh.” If, on the other hand, while knowing and assenting to the facts concerning Christ, we have lived negligently of his commandments, consulting present ease and comfort, and accepting the smiles of a world that disowns him, we may reasonably regard the prospect with apprehension. If we have laid up our treasure on earth, we cannot be surprised that Christ comes empty-handed for us from heaven. If our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things. There is yet time. Let us examine ourselves. Let us judge our own selves. If the record of the past does not appear satisfactory, it is high time to repent and do the first works. If, on the other hand, we can say with Paul, that the “testimony of our conscience” is, that “in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our

conversation in the world," we have cause to rejoice at the tokens in the eastern horizon, which tell us of the approaching rise of the Sun of Righteousness, to fill the world with light and glory.

The Flesh And The Spirit

The breaking of bread loses no interest from repetition.—Any other subject would become threadbare.—The things of the flesh and the things of the spirit.—The things of the spirit cast out.—A distressing situation.—The right way to deal with the matter.—Turn our eyes often to the historical picture.—The situation of the friends of God ages before we were born.—Once upon a time.—We "minded the things of the flesh."—These are legion, and in high esteem everywhere.—What they are.—A new chapter.—The Spirit's work in the earth.—The change.—A new creature.—Minding things of the Spirit.—Not negligent of the affairs of this life.—A different spirit and different objects.—Affections set upon things above.—The Spirit's point of view.—The wisdom of the present age very shallow.—The restless ocean of human change.—The purpose of God unchanged and imperishable.—The suffering of this present time.

WE do not find, as we might expect, that this habit of meeting every Sunday morning to break bread in remembrance of Christ, loses its interest from repetition. On the contrary, the meetings grow more powerful to help us in the direction in which they are intended to draw and develop the mind. This is due to the nature of the matters to which they stand related. Any other subject than the subject of Christ, would become threadbare and insipid from continual treatment. The subject of Christ becomes larger, deeper to the view, and stronger in its power to interest and control the mind ; that is, where the mind is unreservedly surrendered.

Paul says, "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh, and they that are after the Spirit, the things of the Spirit." This distinction of bias existed in Paul's day, and must exist in ours, for human nature is the same. It does exist, as a matter of fact. Its existence is painfully obtruded upon our attention. The only difference is that in our day it is almost all one way. They form a much smaller minority in the 19th than in the 1st century, who "mind the things of the Spirit." The things of the flesh are almost the universal subject of solicitude and affection. The things of the Spirit are regarded with varying degrees of aversion. In every grade of society they are cast out. The wealthy and refined rank them with the story of Aladdin's lamp. The educated and scientific compassionate them as the probable dreams of mankind's moral infancy. Theatre-goers and pleasure-hunters vote them unmitigated

SEASONS OF COMFORT

rubbish. The man of business says they are visionary, and out of his line. The vulgar herd have little more capacity than the beasts that graze on the hillside to form an opinion of them one way or other.

It is a distressing situation. It is the one described by our brother John, the apostle of Christ : he said, "The whole world lieth in wickedness." It is a situation calling for much circumspection. We are liable to be influenced against our own better judgment by the universal infatuation. The sheer weight of numbers is apt to incline the mental scale in the direction the opposite of true enlightenment. The right way to deal with the matter is not to look at men in the gross ; but take any one of them individually. In that way you will measure them easily and decisively. You see at a glance that the flood of human life is a flood of folly, and that the way of wisdom lies in the way of Christ, and in the way of Christ alone. Creatures of sense, as we are, however, the spectacle of universal life, as it now is, is liable, every now and then, to override the perceptions of wisdom, and make us doubt if the narrow way is the right way. We do wisely, therefore, to turn our eyes often to the historical picture symbolized by the bread and wine on the table. Christ and his friends were a very small and despised company, even in the days of Jewish sacerdotal splendour, not to speak of Rome's imperial grandeur, and the world is not more divine now than it was then. If we find ourselves with very few, and those the poor, the illiterate and the despised, let us remember that this was the situation of the friends of God ages before we were born. If we are compelled by the inherent antagonism of the truth to the present evil world in all its developments, to appear as the most unsociable and censorious of men, let us fortify ourselves by the remembrance that the Son of God, the most truly lovely of human kind, was hated by the most enlightened nation of his time, because of his testimony against their evil works. If we find our position in the present life a position of self-denial, endurance, monotony and want of entertainment, let us call to our recollection that even David, surrounded by royal splendours, declared that he dwelt in a dry and thirsty land, wherein there was no water, and moped like an owl in the desert for lack of the love of God among men.

Once upon a time we were all in the condition described by the phrase "after the flesh." We knew life and action in the light only of the thoughts and affections belonging to the unenlightened natural man. In those, the days of our flesh, the leading desire of the mind was to have pleasure. Some of us sought it one way, some in another ; but all of us were alike in being governed by this craving for enjoyment, which is the universal characteristic of those who know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, whether they be intellectual or sensual, refined or brutal, educated or ignorant, rich or poor, old or young. Being after the flesh, we "minded the things of the flesh." We had a controlling interest in and regard for the things that tend to the gratification of "the desires of the flesh." These are legion, and in high esteem everywhere. They begin with

the common wants of life, which, while legitimate enough in the subordinate place in which Christ placed them, are evil pursued as an end. We are deeply interested in making a living. Next, it was a supreme object to have a fine house, and to make opulent provision for our families. From that we went on to desire respectability, and the good opinion of the world. After that we were interested in pleasure in all its endless ramifications, from hunting with aristocrats down to song-singing in the pot-house. Intermediately and more respectably, we were taken up perhaps with some hobby of science or art. But whatever form our taste or affection might take, it was comprisable in Paul's saying that we minded the things of the flesh. We were deeply interested in them; we spent much money on them, those of us who had it to spend. Our lives were moved and formed by them.

But a new chapter has been opened in our lives by our contact with the Spirit's work in the earth. We have been brought into that other state described in Paul's other words, "They that are after the Spirit do mind the things of the Spirit." I will not stay to dwell on the mode of the operation by which this change has been effected, beyond remarking that you are all aware that the gospel is the power employed by God in the bringing of men to Himself. We have abandoned the idea that the change is due to any inspiration or metamorphosis of the sort understood and inculcated by the systems around us. We have come to recognize that our faith comes from hearing the word spoken by the Spirit, through its appointed instrumentality in days gone by, and recorded in the Scriptures of truth for our learning and comfort. Leaving that point, let us ponder a moment the full import of the change from that condition of mind described as "after the flesh" to the state described as "after the Spirit." The change, where it has fully taken place, is a very radical one in Paul's estimation, and Paul's estimation must be the rule of our estimation, if our estimation is to be of any value to us. He says, "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things are become new." The use of the word "if" in this statement implies that there were some in Paul's day professedly in Christ, but still in the flesh. The existence of such a class is placed beyond doubt by the words of Christ to Sardis: "Thou hast a name to live, and art dead." What was possible in the apostolic age, in this respect, is more than possible in ours. It is profitable to recognize this, so that we may escape the confusion and distress resulting from what we may find in persons technically, but not really, in Christ. The habit of taking our own cue from the word, and measuring all men by it, will greatly simplify and ease our journey in probation, and protect us from being influenced to our hurt by the unapostolic ways and maxims of men who may consort with us in the name of the apostles. If any man be truly a son of God, he is after the Spirit, and minds the things of the Spirit. His tastes and affections and enterprises are all in that direction. Christ and his apostles are our examples in the case, and it is nothing short of reachery in the camp for anyone professing allegiance to them to

SEASONS OF COMFORT

teach that they are not our models, or that we are not to be expected to walk in their steps.

The new man in Christ is not negligent of the affairs of this life, but he attends to them in a different way, and with a different spirit and different objects from the old man he was before he became enlightened in the truth. To begin with, he has a God which he had not before, and from this results a faith unknown before, which prevents him from being fearful and anxious about this life's affairs, and from bestowing his exertions upon large schemes of self-provision. He provides for his own, and is diligent in business because the new Master he has received requires it of him ; but what he does, in this respect, he does to the Lord, and not to men, nor to himself, for he serves the Lord Christ ; and while performing this part of his duty, he does not do it to the neglect of those other parts which require him to care for his neighbour, and to serve God in the exhibition of the gospel of His glory in the midst of a dark world in which he is called upon to shine as a light. If, in the exercise of his personal duties in business, plenty comes to his hand, he recognizes that he is a "steward of the manifold grace of God," and that having received much, much will be required at his hand in distributing to the necessity of the saints, and abounding unto every good work ; he does not act the part of the hoarding fool of Christ's parable, who laid up treasure for himself, but was not rich toward God. He obeys the commandment of Christ, which forbids us to lay up treasure upon earth ; and makes to himself friends of the Mammon of unrighteousness, which might otherwise turn to his destruction, for it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom. If he be poor, he remembers the widow's mite, and rejoices that, though little is in his hand, by the faithful use of what opportunity God has put in his power, he may lay up in store for himself in heaven a larger measure of divine approbation and blessing than those who "out of their abundance cast in much."

Rich or poor, his undying characteristic is that "he minds the things of the Spirit." His tastes and affections do not run in the same channel with those of the children of the present world ; his affections are set upon things above, not upon things of the earth. The Spirit's point of view is his point of view. He looks at men and their affairs as Christ did, and takes the course he would have taken. For this reason he cannot be friends with the world. He will not be found partaking in the world's pleasures, or taking part in the world's enterprises. He stands not in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful ; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night. In his eyes, vile men, however refined and ornamental, are despised ; but he honoureth them that fear the Lord, however uncultivated or ungainly.

The things of the flesh are pleasant, and the things of the Spirit are in many points burdensome at present ; but what wise man would falter in choosing the one before the other ? Moses esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, and chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy

the pleasures of sin for a season. In this respect he is the prototype of all men of true wisdom. The wisdom of the practical men of the present age is a very shallow affair. Its results are bounded by present things which pass away—the inherent valuelessness of which even the fool perceives on the day of death. The things of the spirit and the things of the flesh are, to one another, as the incorruptible gem to the perishing toys of childhood, or the shining of the mid-day sun to the flicker of an expiring lamp in a vault. The difference between them is manifest on a moment's consideration. Suppose the case of a dead man who, in his life, lived after the flesh. He comes to life 500 years afterwards. Where are the things he lived for and took care of while he lived? His friends are all dead and forgotten. He himself is a stranger to every living soul upon earth. His house is not to be found; it has crumbled to dust, or been removed as a useless dilapidation. His property, if it exist, is all in the hands of others. His bank account, if by a miracle it has survived such a lapse of time, is in another name. His schemes and enterprises have all disappeared in the restless ocean of human change. Not a shred remains of the things he chose for his portion in life.

But let it be the case of a man of God, who revives after a slumber of centuries. The things he had in his life he used as crutches of the moment merely. They were not the end of his being. God was the strength of his heart and his portion for ever. Christ was the aim, the affection of his life. The sleeping fathers and the prophets and the friends of God in bygone times were his friends and companions, for whom he was waiting. The purpose of God, as declared in the promises, was his hope and his confidence, and he awakes, after 500 years, to find them all unchanged and imperishable. The God whom he trusted and worshipped still reigns eternal in the heavens, the possessor of heaven and earth, which He upholdeth by His power. Christ, the ideal of his enthusiastic admiration, still lives, the same yesterday, to-day and for ever. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets and saints of every age and nation, stand by him or are still the coming vision of supernal friendship and delight. The purpose of God to banish away ill and to wipe the tear from every eye, and fill the earth with the effulgence of His love and glory, are still before him unaltered, as the glorious vision which filled his heart and cheered his sorrows in the brief day of his mortal probation.

Who but a fool, with the benighted intellect of a savage, would suffer himself with such a prospect to be imposed upon by the witcheries and lying appearances of the present evil world? The conflict may be severe; but it is short-lived, and the prize at the end of it is out of all proportion to the effort we are called to put forth. Even with all the rigours of persecution—with goods confiscated, friends banished, liberty taken away, and body tortured even to death, the sons of God in past ages have been able to say, "the suffering of this present time is not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." And what craven and unworthy aspirants to association with them shall we be, if with all the

comforts of home life, and all the liberty and security which we enjoy under the shadow of modern freedom, we shall begrudge the trifling voluntary sacrifices which the service of Christ demands at our hands, or be ashamed of the reproach which identification with it entails.

The Fellow-Heirship of The Gentiles

A certain mystery.—Those that are outside.—They understand not the mystery of the fellow-heirship.—So much jargon to them.—Why?—The orthodox view.—No understanding of the original heirship of Israel.—An ingenious suggestion.—The suggestion inconsistent with facts.—Christ sent Paul to do this work.—Fellow-heirship contingent on being turned from darkness to light.—Before Paul's day, the Gentiles without hope.—Immortal-soul traditions.—The divine dealings in the past restricted to Israel.—Paul, as the bearer of an invitation to the Gentiles.—Beforetime a mystery.—Wild olive branches grafted on the good olive tree.—Jews inwardly.—Some things of urgent importance.—Unholy associations.—This ungodly class who walk after the flesh.—Walking in pride.—Defended as a virtue.—What the world says, and what Christ says.—We are not our own.—The decision of our case in judgment.—“According to his works.”—The power of darkness.—Servants.—Masters.—The poor.—The rich.—All and sundry.—Their recompense.

In the portion of the Word read this morning from the Ephesians, Paul tells the brethren that what he had to say to them, he said on the supposition that they had heard and understood a certain matter which he styles a mystery. “If,” says he, “ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is given me to you-ward; how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery . . . which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.” What is this mystery which in other ages had been withheld from the knowledge of men? He answers the question in the words immediately following: “That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.”

Let us ponder this a little. Let us look at it first with regard to those that are without, and then as it bears upon ourselves. It would not be needful to consider those that are outside in the matter at all, were it not for the fact that they claim to be the people of the Lord and to stand on scriptural ground. They are a mighty and a respectable multitude, and always in contact with us, in one way or other, and therefore we are bound, more or less, every other now and

then, to consider them. Here, then, we put their claims to the test. We ask them if they understand this mystery which before Paul's day was hidden, but in Paul's day was revealed, and by the hands of Paul made open and effectual for the salvation of the Gentiles. If they do not, Paul's words are not for them ; for it is only " if " people have heard of the matter and understand it that Paul expects what he has to say to be acceptable or appropriate. If people have not heard and understood the mystery of the fellow-heirship of the Gentiles, then there will be much in Paul's letters that is unintelligible.

Ask orthodox professors if they understand it. You will be answered by a blank look. Paul's statement is so much jargon to them, containing no idea. Their ideas and views of things prevent their understanding it. What are their ideas and views? Why, that man is an immortal being by nature, and that immortal souls that are virtuous (as men talk) when they leave the bodies they have inhabited on earth, which they are supposed to do with consciousness, identity and mental power unimpaired, do, by reason of the eternal laws of justice (as philosophic babblers phrase it), depart to a blessed state, a saved state ; that state to which Abraham and all the prophets are supposed to have departed ; consequently, that Pythagoras, Plato, Socrates, and their disciples of the Greek schools ; Confucius, the Chinese philosopher, and all his followers ; Zoroaster and his Persian devotees ; and all natural thinkers of every barbarous clime and nation, whose thoughts have taken a " religious " turn, however dark and mistaken that turn may have been—the orthodox view is that all these classes—the multitudes of them who lived before the days of Christ—have all gone to glory in heaven. Consequently, of what meaning to them are Paul's words, that in pre-apostolic ages, the very idea of the Gentiles being fellow-heirs of the promise with Israel, was a concealed mystery : " which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men " ? Not only have they no idea of the fellow-heirship of the Gentiles, but they have no idea that there is anything to have a fellow-heirship in. They have no understanding of the original heirship of Israel. They have no idea of salvation's being confined within a certain line of things—within the groove of certain promises established in covenant with the fathers of the house of Israel. Their notions are purely pagan. They think man—all men, Jew or Gentile—immortal, and a happy immortality, an affair of natural morality. Consequently, there is no place in their thoughts for covenants of promise appertaining to Israel and the long-established exclusion therefrom of mankind in general.

An ingenious adversary of the orthodox type might suggest that Paul's words are a confirmation of the orthodox view ; that in fact they mean that in Paul's day it was revealed, what had not before been revealed, that the Gentiles of all ages, before and after Christ, were fellow-heirs of salvation with Israel, notwithstanding their darkness and exclusion from the covenants of promise. The suggestion, however, is inconsistent with those facts of the case which interpret Paul's words. We are not dependent for the meaning of them merely upon the statement itself, though the statement itself

is sufficient, for what does he say? "That the Gentiles *should be* fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ *by the gospel.*" This shows that the fellow-heirship did not relate to pre-apostolic times, and that where the fellow-heirship was brought into effect, it was by the instrumentality of the gospel preached and believed; which is sufficient to exclude its application to the Gentiles who lived before Paul's day and on whom the gospel was never brought to bear. But the facts of Paul's case place the matter beyond all doubt. What are those facts briefly stated? It was Christ who sent Paul to do this work towards the Gentiles. Now let us listen to Christ's language in committing this dispensation to the hands of Paul: "Unto the Gentiles now I send thee, *to open their eyes*, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan (the adversary) unto God, *that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith that is in me*" (Acts 26 : 18). This speaks for itself. The receiving by the Gentiles of forgiveness and inheritance (the fellow-heirship) was contingent on being turned from darkness to light; and this operation Paul was sent to perform on living men. Before he performed it, they were in darkness, and that in this state they were without hope is plainly stated by Paul himself in the case of the very Ephesians to whom he is writing in the chapter we are considering. He tells them that before he came to them, they were "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having NO HOPE, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2 : 12). This effectually disposes of the suggestion that Paul's mission to the Gentiles was to tell them that they had hope, and that they were heirs of salvation and had been so all along without any reference to the gospel.

We therefore return to the fact that before Paul's day, the Gentiles were without hope, and that his mission was to proclaim the purpose of God to admit them to fellow-heirship of the promises, and to announce the conditions on which that admission would be allowed. I remind you again that Paul's words are to us "if" we have heard and understood this matter. To those around us, who profess to be based on Paul's doctrine, it is unintelligible because their pagan immortal-soul traditions nullify it. To those enlightened in the truth, the words are highly intelligible and very interesting. That enlightenment shows us mankind mortal, wicked, condemned, and exiled from all divine relation—disqualified in every way to approach God or to nurse hope. It shows us God divulging His own plan and issuing His own invitations on His own principles, with a stringency illustrated in His striking Nadab and Abihu to death for bringing strange fire in their censers to offer in the tabernacle, saying, "I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me." It shows us that plan unfolding itself in the selection of a particular family of mankind—a family begotten to himself in a miraculous interposition in the birth of Isaac. It shows us this family made the repository of the promises—the Israelites, "to whom," as Paul says, "pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the

law, and the service of God, and the promises" (Rom. 9 : 4). It shows us this family the sole object of divine recognition among the nations of the earth, as we read in Amos 3 : 2 : "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." It shows us all the divine dealings in the past absolutely restricted to this one nation and those of the Gentiles who might incorporate themselves with it (Isa. 56 : 3-6). It shows Christ's own labours avowedly confined within this restricted channel, saying to his disciples, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel . . . Go not into the way of the Gentiles." It shows us the early believers, for a time "preaching the word unto none but unto the Jews only" (Acts 11 : 19). It then shows us Paul coming forth as the bearer of an invitation to the Gentiles who had not beforetime been invited. He calls this a mystery which had beforetime been concealed. It is an appropriate and instructive designation. It was a mystery. The promises to Abraham, in the very beginning, announced Jehovah's purpose to bless all families of the earth, and yet, up to Christ's time no provision had been made for extending the blessing of Abraham to them. The prophets plainly intimated the participation of all nations—the nations of the Gentiles—in the glories made sure to the house of Israel, and yet announced no arrangement by which meanwhile the way to that participation might be opened. It therefore remained a mystery how the evident purpose of God was to be carried out. It was a mystery, "which, in other ages, was not made known unto the sons of men"; but which, at the last, was "revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets" of the apostolic age. Peter, referring to the matter, said in the council of the apostles, as recorded in Acts 15 : 7 : "Ye know how that, a good while ago, God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe." The invitation to the Gentiles was officially inaugurated by the hands of Peter, and the practical working out of it was committed to Paul—at that time a persecutor—on whom Christ laid his hands as a chosen vessel to bear his name before kings.

We will now look at the matter in its bearing upon ourselves. We are, of course, all aware of the effect of the apostolic work on all who come within the compass of its operations, as regards their original relationship. Originally, they are Gentiles; but such they no longer remain when they become subject to the adoption that is in Christ. "In time past," says Paul, "they were Gentiles in the flesh," but in Christ they cease to be "strangers and foreigners," and become fellow-citizens with the members of the original Israelitish family—(Eph. 2 : 19-20)—wild olive branches grafted among the branches of the original Abrahamic good olive tree, with whom they partake of the root and fatness of the good olive tree (Rom. 11 : 17-24). They are not saved as Gentiles, but as Gentiles transformed into Israelites indeed, Jews inwardly (Rom. 2 : 29). It is not, however, to this aspect of the work of the truth among us that I wish to call attention; but to one that comes closer than that, the question of what manner of persons it is designed these Jews inwardly should be, and which, if they be not, they will be

rejected. This is the question with which the epistles of Paul especially deal, and it is from these epistles we get the right cue in the matter. The epistles have not been addressed to us personally, but they are none the less applicable to us on that account. They were written to certain persons in the first century, not because of their individuality, or because they lived in certain places, but because of their relation to Paul's work and to Christ. For that reason they are addressed (as, indeed, they more than once allege) to "all that in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," and therefore to us, if that define our position.

What then has Paul to say on the supposition that we have heard and understood the dispensation committed to him by Christ, by which we have the wonderful distinction of being invited to a participation in the kingdom and glory of God? He says, "I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love." Let us ponder this. It suggests some things of urgent importance which we may be liable to overlook in our zeal for other forms of truth in the abstract. If we walk unworthily of the vocation, what then? There are people in our day—oh! they are so numerous as to depress the spirit oftentimes, and make the heart cry out for the blight and barrenness of the age in which we live—who, instead of speaking the truth in love, and adorning the doctrine of God by the excellence of their deportment, on the contrary defile and disfigure it by a most unholy association with "all bitterness, wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, hatred, variance, emulations, strife, seditions, envyings." Such there were in the apostolic age. Jude speaks of them as "spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear. . . . Murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts, and their mouth speaking great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage." Peter also describes them in language equally strong: "Presumptuous are they, self-willed, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities: whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord. But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption." Let us beware of the influence of this ungodly class who walk after the flesh. Be it ours to walk worthy of the heavenly vocation in Christ in all lowliness—not in mightiness: mightiness is the order of the day. It is the universal habit to walk in pride. Society in every grade exemplifies it. It is even defended as a virtue. Be it ours, as Christ's brethren, to hold and to carry out Christ's views on the subject, and not the views of the respectable world which lieth in wickedness, though it be not aware of it. The world says: "Be ambitious; keep up appearances; get as high as you can." Christ says by the mouth of his apostles, "Mind not high things; condescend to men of low estate. Be content with such things as ye have. Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God. Let this mind be in you

which was in Christ, who made himself of no reputation." The world says, "Look after yourself; get as much money as you can; everybody else does: why not you?" Christ says, "Look every man on the things of his neighbour; bear one another's burdens; labour not to be rich; lay not up treasures on earth. Learn of me. I came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." The world says, "You are your own master; you have a right to do as you like." Christ says, "Ye are not your own. Ye are bought with a price. Wherefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

What the world says is continually dinned in our ears, so to speak, in one form or other; and we have all of us a nature sufficiently prone to feel a sympathetic response to its suggestions and maxims. There is consequently imperative need to resist constantly the world's pleasant doctrines, and to insist constantly on those of Christ, which though unpalatable to the natural man, bring great purity and peace in our present experience, and enrich and tranquillize the prospect with promise of the life to come. We shall all experience at the last the truth of the statement that we are not our own. The judgment seat will reveal the case nakedly as it is—that we are the property of another and that all we have is his property, for the use of which we shall have to account. We shall then see that now in this time, when we are not permitted to see the fact, God has invisibly, but really by a series of perfectly natural arrangements on the surface, conferred upon us what time, health, money, or opportunity we have in trust for our trial. We shall see that it is a literal fact and not a pretty sentiment that the brethren of Christ are not their own property, but actually belong to their now absent, yet cognizant, and then present master. Jesus plainly teaches that the decision of our case in judgment will hinge upon our stewardship in these present affairs in which most men can see no divine relation. He says: "If ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? If ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" It is added that the Pharisees, "who were covetous, heard all these things: and *they derided him*" (Luke 16:14). This is precisely the treatment which the doctrine receives at the hands of the same class in the present day; but it is true for all that, and no wise man will be deterred by conventional prejudice from proclaiming the truth. Every man at last will be judged "according to his works": so Jesus has declared over and over again, and if there seems harshness in the continual assertion of these things, it is due to the peculiarity of the present situation, in which the carnal mind has a host of advocates and apologists, and few are valiant for the commandments of Christ. The power of darkness is enthroned on every side, and but for constant vigilance in the fight, the flood would pour in on every side and extinguish the little light enkindled. All seek their own and not the things of Jesus Christ, so much so that even those who seek the things of Christ are suspected of aiming, like the rest, at their own objects. Well, the day of Christ will reveal

SEASONS OF COMFORT

the secrets of all hearts. If a man live to himself, regarding himself as his own property, and consulting only his own comfort and honour in the present evil world, he will reap as he has sown. The reward that Christ brings is for those who live to him as his servants, agents and stewards, in all their arrangements and affairs; and how this is to be done is made plain in the word of his apostles, which addresses itself to every grade. Servants are to be "obedient to them that are their masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as unto Christ; not with eye-service as men-pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Eph. 6:5). Masters are to "do the same things" to the servants, doing what they do as to Christ, and not to men, in the recollection that they have a Master in heaven who is no respecter of persons, and who will render to them according to the divine and not the human rule of judgment. The poor are to be "content with such things as they have," yet not to consider themselves exempt from the service of giving at the call of Christ, for the work or for his poorer still; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased. They are to remember that if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that a man hath not, and that, therefore, the poor can sow as bountifully as the rich, like the widow woman of Christ's commendation, and like the brethren of Macedonia of whom Paul says that "in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For according to their power I bear record, yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves, praying us with much entreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints" (Heb. 13:5, 16; 2 Cor. 8:1-4; 9:6-7). The rich also have their part marked out; they are to rejoice in the social degradation to which their submission to the truth subjects them (Jas. 1:10), and they are to be "rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate" (1 Tim. 6:18). In this way they are to fulfil the part of "good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet. 4:10). All and sundry, of every age and station, who belong to Christ, are to walk in love and follow holiness, without which, they are informed, no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). Being thus found worthy of the vocation to which the kindness of God in Christ has called them, they will be invited at the judgment seat to enter and inherit the kingdom prepared for them. And who shall declare, then, the greatness and joy of their recompense? The brief conflict of mortal years will have ended in the victory of immortality, and the honour of an unfading crown. Trial will have given place to approbation; labour to its reward; and the endurances of self-denial and obedience, in a dark and evil age, to the unspeakable enjoyments of the incorruptible and perfect world to come.

Paul As A Christ-Appointed Model

The apostle Paul.—Educated people's estimate of him.—An interesting historical character merely.—A very different view of the case.—Paul a Christ-appointed model.—A chosen vessel.—A safe example.—Paul's commands.—His self-assertions not egotistical.—Kind and necessary he should hold himself well in the front.—Studying his character.—A few of the points in the portrait.—No high estimate of himself.—Truthful, but not vain-glorious.—Earnest, ardent, thorough-going, uncompromising.—What was the nature of his extraordinary devotion?—Something to be warm about.—The nature of the facts before Paul's mind.—What stirred Paul's enthusiasm will stir ours.—A risen Christ before his mind.—Christ's present existence.—The Eternal Creator.—Impossible that he should be otherwise than enthusiastic.—A question of faith.—A man shows his faith by his works.—Paul's faith leads to Paul's fervour.—Unsafe ground to say we are not Paul.—Paul a tender-hearted, sympathizing, self-sacrificing man.—Kept himself from being burdensome.—Practised and enjoined a robust-minded discernment.—No parish relieving officer.—A benevolent concern for those less favoured.—Paul a true shepherd.—All of us have an appointed care of one another.—Other points.

It has long been on record, and has been perpetually illustrated in all the generations that have run since it was written, that "he that walketh with wise men shall be wise, but the companion of fools shall fall." The truth embodied in this divine saying has an intimate bearing on our position as obedient believers on the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us occupy our minds this morning with one particular application of it, which we shall find to be very profitable. The application concerns the apostle Paul.

You are well aware that it is customary in our day, among what are considered the educated people of society, to estimate the apostle Paul very lightly. People will admit that he was an able, energetic and conscientious man, and that he did a great work and left a great example; but their commendation is always qualified in a way that takes away all practical meaning or usefulness from it. They say Paul was "all very well for his day," which is as much as to say that in our day, he and his work are obsolete, and that he cannot be made useful in the circumstances of the nineteenth century; that, in fact, he is pretty much in the position of an early inventor, whose productions have been superseded by later contrivances, built, it may be, upon the foundation laid by him. Paul, they say, was able, but bigoted; energetic, but unenlightened; conscientious, but mistaken and narrow-minded in his views of truth—in which case, of course, he would sink in the estimation of all intelligent men to the position he occupies with the class in question, namely, to the position of an interesting historical character, but of no more practical utility to us than an Egyptian mummy.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Now we, brethren, are acquainted with many and unanswerable reasons for taking a very different view of the case. We know that Paul and his work are of as vital consequence to us as to those on whom they were brought to bear in the first century; that through the invitation and instruction sent from God by his hand, we may attain to life everlasting; and that, apart from them, we have no hope whatever, however fine our philosophical or literary notions may be, or however high our conceptions may be of nineteenth century attainments. It is not my purpose, however, to speak of those reasons, which belong to another time. My object is to use the conviction we have acquired, and to bring Paul to bear upon us in such a way as will enable us to measure ourselves, and to see ourselves as we appear in the light of the divine standard.

Nothing is plainer in the whole course of the apostolic testimony than that Paul is a Christ-appointed model for us to copy. We have first Christ's own declaration concerning Paul to Ananias of Damascus: "He is a chosen vessel unto me" (Acts 9:15). A man chosen by Christ must needs be a safe example for all the servants of Christ to follow. Paul commands—and what he wrote were the commandments of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37). "Be ye followers of ME, as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). The sense in which he means this is made abundantly evident in many places. He tells us expressly, for instance, that he, though a persecutor, received mercy that "in him first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, FOR A PATTERN to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting" (1 Tim. 1:16). Accordingly, to the Philippians, he says (4:9): "Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, DO." And, again (3:17): "Mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example."

To the Corinthians he speaks thus plainly: "Though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers . . . wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Cor. 4:15). To Timothy he commends his own example in saying: "Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience" (2 Tim. 3:10); and to the Thessalonians he says: "Yourselves know how ye ought to follow us. . . We made ourselves an example unto you to follow us" (2 Thess. 3:7, 9). "Stand fast," he tells them, "and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle." "Ye are witnesses," he also said, "and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe." It is customary in polite society to consider those sayings egotistical. The polite, however, judge by a false standard in the matter. It is not egotistical, according to the scriptural standard, for a man devoid of self-love to declare the truth concerning himself when that declaration is necessary. Paul was no self-lover; but if he was the appointed example from Christ of the sort of man Christ would choose from mankind for

association with himself in glory, it was kind and necessary that Paul should testify this and hold the fact well in the front. The fact stands so, and Paul has acted in accordance with the fact; and our wisdom is to study the pattern, that we may copy it, and stand with Paul in the day of resurrection, which is at the door.

It is our lot to live long after Paul's day; consequently, we have not the privilege of personal intercourse with him. It is in our power, notwithstanding, to study his character and realize our model. Perhaps it is more in our power to do this than if he were alive. A man's life can always be more accurately judged when looked at as a whole, and seen against the background of death, than when contemplated amid the bustle and the prejudices and the limited information of the contemporary generation. Let us look at a few of the points in the portrait of our beloved brother Paul, always remembering that we look at it for the purpose of copying a model, and that we act inconsistently with our profession as brethren if we ever yield to the temptation of saying, "I am not Paul."

At the first rough glance, what do we see? Why, that, as a brother has well remarked, Paul did not belong to the church of Laodicea. You remember the character of that ecclesia as sketched by Christ to John in Patmos. It was lukewarm—neither cold nor hot, and yet on very good terms with itself. It said, "I am rich and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." It was not aware that its spiritual attainments, so highly estimated in its own self-complacency, were of a very sickly and meagre aspect in the eyes of the Spirit of God—so much so as to lead Jesus to declare that they were "wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17). Paul had no such high estimate of himself. He says to the Philippians: "I count not myself to have apprehended (not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect); but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling" (Phil. 3:13). To the Corinthians he said: "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27). Nevertheless, though thinking thus modestly of himself, he was not afraid to declare before the Jewish Council: "I have lived before God in all good conscience unto this day" (Acts 23:1); and to the brethren in Corinth: "Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward" (2 Cor. 1:12). Finally, at the end of his probation, his last words were words of self-confidence—truthful but not vainglorious: "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." From this, it results that a man may be characterized by sentiments of self-depreciation, and yet consistently indulge in self-assertion, if a good conscience warrant it, and the occasion require.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Paul was as unlike the brethren of Laodicea as possible in their lukewarmness. If there is one thing about him that stands out more strikingly than another, it is his earnest, ardent, thorough-going, uncompromising and warm-hearted identification with all things pertaining to Christ. His was no yea-and-nay, half-and-half addition to the service. His earnest enthusiasm was such that he was reputed "beside himself." His answer is, "Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God. . . . For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead (that is, all died with the one) . . . that they who live should *not henceforth live unto themselves*, but unto him who died for them, and rose again. . . . Wherefore *henceforth know we no man after the flesh*" (2 Cor. 5 : 13). Again, he declares : "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord : for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3 : 8). Again : "For me to live is Christ" ; and again : "I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2 : 2). The general aspect of his case is vigorously drawn in the following words : "We are fools for Christ's sake ; but ye"—Corinthians, of whom he had just said, "Are ye not carnal, and walk as men ?"—"ye are wise in Christ ; we are weak, but ye are strong ; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place ; and labour, working with our own hands : being reviled, we bless ; being persecuted, we suffer it ; being defamed, we entreat : we are made as the filth of the world, as the offscouring of all things unto this day" (1 Cor. 4 : 10). In the declaration to the Philippians already quoted, for Christ he had "suffered the loss of all things, and counted them but dung, that he might win Christ" (Phil. 3 : 8).

It is profitable to ask, What was the nature of this extraordinary devotion on the part of Paul to Christ ! Was it, merely the result of an ardent temperament ? Was it mere peculiarity of Paul's natural man ? We should err greatly, and weaken much the power of his example, if we were to answer these questions in the affirmative. There can be no doubt that Paul was a man of a warm nature—the fitting soil for the good seed of the kingdom—but even a man of a warm nature cannot be warm without something to be warm about. Enthusiasm, however strongly it may exist in a man's breast, requires something to stir it. It is in the nature of the facts before Paul's mind that we are to find the true explanation of the zeal that led him to abjure the ordinary objects of human life, and to throw himself entirely into a matter that appeared bootless and without reason to the ordinary run of men. The importance of recognizing this lies in the fact that what stirred Paul's enthusiasm will stir ours. We only require to believe the same things to experience the same results. A man's enthusiasm always runs in the channel of his practical convictions. The children of the present world are in earnest about present matters whenever they believe

there is good in them. Let a promising commercial enterprise be brought under a man's notice—an opportunity of promotion—an avenue to honour—a way to certain wealth—and you will see the most sluggish man wake up and manifest enthusiasm in pursuing it. Paul's was no irrational enterprise. On the contrary, it was highly enlightened and essentially logical and consistent. He had a risen Christ before his mind; he recognized Christ's present existence and controlling presence in heaven; he looked forward to the certainty of standing before his judgment seat at his coming, and of receiving at his hands the unspeakable gift of immortality, and a place in the endless kingdom of God, if his present ways were acceptable to Christ. He had constantly before his face the Eternal Creator of heaven and earth, who, in the unity of universal presence, is near to every one of us, from whom no creature is hid, to whose eyes all things are naked and open. With this mental picture of facts before his mind, it was impossible that he should be otherwise than earnest and enthusiastic. Any man with similar assured convictions must feel the stirring of a similar ardour of purpose. It is a question of faith. Every man has a faith of some sort; and his works are generally—nay, invariably—in accordance with it. If his professed faith and his works are out of harmony, it is because his professed faith is not a living faith. He professes confidence in a man, but will not trust him, because he secretly doubts him. If he had real confidence, he would show it. Another man really has confidence in him, and shows it by putting himself, perhaps, entirely in his hands. So with commercial enterprises or private affairs in general. A man shows his faith by his works. James may well say, "Show me thy faith by thy works." A faith that does not express itself in acts accordant with it, is no faith. It is dead. Paul's faith was real, therefore his enthusiasm was strong, and his works in harmony. It is simply disgusting to hear it set down to temperament. Such a suggestion can only emanate from those who are strangers to Paul's faith. If they had Paul's faith, they would understand Paul's fervour. All men have faith in money, and they show it, whatever their temperament may be. If all men had faith in Christ, they would show it, irrespective of peculiarities of temperament. This faith is conviction indeed, by acquaintance with the facts. The scarcity of it is due to the smallness of this acquaintance. "Faith cometh by hearing"; but people will not take the trouble to hear, which, in our day, means read. They turn wholly aside after pleasure or business, which monopolizes the mind and leaves the facts of God's truth no opportunity of obtaining power with them.

The point to realize is that in Paul's non-Laodicean "heat" of mind towards the things that are Christ's, he is our appointed example, and that we tread on very unsafe ground, if we excuse ourselves on the ground that we are not Paul. If we are to stand with Paul in the day of approbation, we must stand with him now in this particular—that we must be in earnest in our admiration and love, and service and obedience of Christ.

The next feature of the pattern is that Paul was a tender-hearted,

sympathizing, self-sacrificing man, mindful of others, interested in the brethren, solicitous of their welfare, and compassionate of the poor. This comes out in a variety of ways. His letters abound with illustrations of it. When James, Peter, and John countenanced, in a special way, the mission of Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles, they exhorted them to be mindful of the poor, "the same," says Paul, "*which I also was forward to do*" (Gal. 2 : 10). Accordingly, we find him prominently co-operating in works of almsgiving. He tells the Corinthians (2 Cor. 9 : 1) that it is "superfluous" for him to write to them "touching the ministering to the saints." They already recognized that matter-of-course branch of service in Christ. "I know the forwardness of your mind," he says, "for which I boasted to them of Macedonia." Nevertheless, lest his boasting should be in vain—lest some of Macedonia should come with him and find the Corinthians unready, and he and they be ashamed together, he sent a deputation of brethren in advance of himself, to make up a certain bounty beforehand, of which they had had previous notice. He tells them that such a ministration as he was arranging for, not only supplied the wants of the saints, but the "liberal distribution" was fruitful in the production of much thanksgiving, and practically useful in the manifestation of their subjection to Christ. Personally, as he told the Ephesian elders, he coveted no man's silver or gold (Acts 20 : 33). His own hands had provided for the necessities of himself and those that were with him. Yet, in frequent need, the brethren sent unto him "once and again unto his necessity" (Phil. 4 : 16). If, in such a case, he appeared to desire it of them, it was not in the spirit of covetousness, but as a matter of service merely, and that "fruit might abound to their account" (verse 17). His exhortation was that "so labouring, they ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said it is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20 : 35), reminding them that those who in these things served God sparingly, would reap sparingly, while a bountiful service would have a bountiful reward (2 Cor. 9 : 6). There were some from whom he was careful not to receive anything, probably because he observed a want of enlightened appreciation and an upbraiding spirit in the case. He tells the Corinthians that when he was present with them, and wanted, he was chargeable to none of them ; that that which he required, the brethren visiting from Macedonia supplied. In all things, he says, he had kept himself from being burdensome to that particular ecclesia, and intended so to do ; adding, with emphasis, that no man should stop his boasting on that point. So that Paul, while practising and inculcating the duty of giving, "made a difference," according to circumstances. He only accepted fellowship in the matter where it was done in the spirit of true service to Christ. He had, likewise, a strong objection to helping those who leant upon the kindness of the brethren. He had heard that in Thessalonica there were some of this sort "working not at all." He had even found it necessary, while personally among them, to lay down this doctrine : that "if any would not work, neither should he eat." From this it

follows that Paul did not favour indiscriminate almsgiving, but practised and enjoined a robust-minded discernment as to the fitness of cases. This, however, was only a minor shade in his character—necessary, certainly, but not the all-distinguishing feature, as with some when invited to be merciful. Though prudent, he was no parish relieving officer. The principal feature was a benevolent concern for those who had been less favoured in the distribution of God's bounties. In this he was unlike the false shepherds of Israel, to whom God said by Ezekiel (34 : 2-10) : "Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves ! should not the shepherds feed the flocks ? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed : but ye feed not the flock . . . Behold, I am against the shepherds ; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock."

Paul, himself a true shepherd, exhorted the leading brethren in Ephesus to feed the flock with true kindness and care. Peter does the same thing, adding that "when the *chief shepherd* shall appear," all such faithful shepherds shall receive a royal trust of larger dimensions. We are not all in the formal position of shepherds, but all of us have an appointed care of one another. The shepherd spirit applies to the whole, because of Christ ; and though wolves sometimes array themselves in fleece, for the sake of the attention that belongs to the sheep, we must take care not to be betrayed into a neglect of the precept and examples given for our development, in preparation for the unspeakable exaltation that awaits us, if Christ approve.

There are other points in the model which Christ has given us in Paul, which there will be no time to consider on the present occasion.

Paul And True Godliness

Return to the consideration of Paul.—A contrast to the secular-minded “civilization” of our day.—His constant, practical, robust-minded, unaffected recognition of God.—Beggarly presentation of Paul’s gospel.—The love of God.—Knowing not the Father.—Ashamed to acknowledge God.—“D.V.”—A slavish compliance with conventionalism.—Paul’s recognition of God.—Constant and natural.—The constant vision of his mental man.—Paul a man of prayer.—His first appearance.—His urgent exhortation that the brethren should give themselves to prayer.—No levity.—No conciliation of unjustified men.—No jesting nor foolish talking.—Salutations all divine.—Paul affectionately interested in the brethren.—The nineteenth century.—Men harden each other in pride.—The school of Christ.—Paul a tender-hearted man.—Tears.—Not all head.—Many called brethren, who conform not to the Pauline standard.—Summary of Paul’s character.—A copy set us by Christ.

WE cannot do better, on the present occasion, than return to the consideration of Paul as the model which Christ has avowedly set forth for the study and imitation of all succeeding generations of disciples. So many other models are pressed upon our attention in modern times, and we are in daily contact with so much that is alien to the case and principles of Paul, that it is a matter of necessity that we look closely at, and conform as much as we can, to the standard to which Christ would have us rise. God said to the adversary of Job : “ Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth . . . one that feareth God, and escheweth evil ? ” The case before us is as if Christ said to us : “ Hast thou considered my servant Paul, who is a chosen vessel unto me, and an example of what I desire to see in all my brethren ? ”

We have looked at him in the ardour of his devotion to Christ ; in his modest self-estimate, yet courageous assertion of personal truth, and in his disinterested concern for the poor. There are many other notable points in the picture. The most conspicuous, perhaps, is that in which he presents so complete a contrast to the secular-minded “ civilization ” of our day—namely, his constant, practical, robust-minded, unaffected recognition of God. God is in the foreground of all he does, says, or thinks. God is not a theory with him—not a doctrine merely—not an intellectual conception—but a fact perceived and taken into account in as matter-of-fact a way as a man does his friend or the weather. His gospel is not merely the gospel of the Kingdom : it is first, the “ gospel of God ” (1 Thess. 2 : 9). He thought of himself as a personal agent of God, by whom God approached men with entreaty to be conformed and reconciled to Him, in a personal sense. “ We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God ” (2 Cor. 5 : 20). To the Athenians, he placed the presentation of God first : “ Whom ye

ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you—God that made the world, and all things therein” (Acts 17 : 23). “He commandeth all men everywhere to repent.” Again, to the men of Lystra, he said : “We preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, who made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein” (Acts 14 : 15). The message from God—the gospel in its technical sense—is placed second, which is a natural order of ideas. This message is summarized in the fact of His “having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself” (Eph. 1 : 9). A man aware of this message, but not acquainted and in friendship with God Himself, is not in the circle of the saintship, to which we are invited by the hand of Paul. Let us beware of those beggarly presentations of Paul’s gospel, which leave out its warmth and its colour and its glory. The love of God is the first feature of the house of God, which Paul laboured to establish. Without it, Paul’s doctrines become so many rattling bones with which slaves of the flesh may perhaps make music to themselves, like the dusky buffoons of modern minstrelsy, but which are of no benefit to anybody unless they are in fervid love with God, from whom they originate. It was the fault Jesus found with the Pharisees that, with all their compliances with Moses, “they had not the love of God in them” (John 5 : 42). They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God (John 12 : 43). It is the possibility (illustrated in more cases than one) that we may acknowledge Christ and know the elementary facts of the truth, and yet, while having thus a name to live, be dead, knowing not the Father, who is the head of Christ, and apart from whom Christ has no meaning. To love God was more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. This was the sentiment of one of the Scribes, the expression of which elicited from Christ the remark that he was not far from the kingdom of God (Mark 12 : 34). So, to love God is more than all money-spending, meeting-holding, and doctrine-defining that men may engage in, without a sanctifying recognition of the Creator of heaven and earth. These things have their place, but if they are without Paul’s love of God, they are as salt without savour. It was the first of the great commandments—that men should love God with all their strength and soul and mind. This is the “first commandment” both of the law and the gospel. It is one exemplified in the case of Paul, who, even before his enlightenment, worshipped the God of his fathers, and was zealous towards Him (Acts 22 : 3), and afterwards was a living embodiment of it in all its manifold relations.

In our day, men are ashamed to acknowledge God. Even when there is a professional recognition of Him in a ceremonial way, it is obscured in Latin words (*Deo Volente*) and these are pared down to their smallest form—their first letters. Men, who think they ought at all events to appear pious, propose to do so and so, “D.V.”

This is very different from Paul’s straightforward, sincere and manly—“if the Lord will.” “D.V.” is reducing the recognition

SEASONS OF COMFORT

of God to its smallest dimensions. It is not in reality a recognition and confession of God, but a compliance with the conventionalism of the Gentile apostasy from apostolic truth and simplicity—a respectable system which overshadows the world with the shadow of death and from which every earnest man will seek to deliver himself by a return to the clear and healthy and saving example of Paul.

His recognition of God even in common things, is constant and natural. He is, in fact, a good example of what James means when he refers deprecatingly to those who say, "To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain." Says James (4 : 14), "Ye know not what shall be on the morrow. . . Ye ought to say, *If the Lord will*, we shall live, and do this or that." This was the habit of Paul, our example from Christ. Parting with the brethren at Ephesus, he said, "I will return again unto you, *if God will*" (Acts 18 : 21). Writing to the Corinthians as to the prospect of a visit, he says (1 Cor. 4 : 19), "I will come to you shortly, *if the Lord will*." So to the Romans, he says he had "made request in prayer that he might have a prosperous journey to them *by the will of God*" (1 : 10); and he asks them to pray that "he might come to them with joy *by the will of God*" (15 : 32). The brethren following his example when they could not dissuade Paul from running into danger at Jerusalem, said, "The will of the Lord be done" (Acts 21 : 14). Peter in the same line of things, recognized that if any brother found himself in circumstances of suffering, it was the will of God (1 Pet. 3 : 17), and "according to that will" (4 : 19). If a door was opened to Paul, it was opened to him "of the Lord" (2 Cor. 2 : 12). If Paul lived in all good conscience, it was "before God" (Acts 23 : 1). If he spoke with special emphasis, it was before God in Christ (2 Cor. 12 : 19). If he abstained from lying, it was before God (Gal. 1 : 20). If he addressed himself to Timothy in a specially solemn way, it was before God (1 Tim. 5 : 21; 2 Tim. 4 : 1). If he desired a witness to the truth of his assertions, it was God whom he served (Rom. 1 : 9; Phil. 1 : 8; 1 Thess. 2 : 5). If he desired to comfort the brethren, his appeal was to the fact that God was faithful, *who would not suffer them* to be tempted above that they were able to bear (1 Cor. 10 : 13), and who was able to make all grace abound toward them (2 Cor. 9 : 8); and so on, through many examples. Paul, like the Lord himself, set God always before him. It was the constant vision of his mental man. He is our example. Do not be satisfied with any other. Beware of the blighting influence of refined society, or the example of the vulgar in this matter. The world lieth in wickedness. It knows not God. Its ways and thoughts and habits are odious in His eyes; and we are in danger of being conformed to all these. Listen to the command of the Spirit by Paul, which says, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove (or realize in yourselves) what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12 : 2). "In all thy ways acknowledge him."

In view of Paul's habitual recognition of God, it is natural to find that he was a man of prayer—another feature of our model to consider. Almost his first appearance on the page of New Testament history exhibits him in this aspect. Jesus said to Ananias, when directing him where to find Saul of Tarsus, "Behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9 : 11). Immured in prison at Philippi, in the darkness and silence of night, "Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises" (Acts 16 : 25). Bidding farewell with the Ephesian brethren at Miletus, "he knelt down and prayed with them all" (20 : 36). Visiting at the temple, he prayed (22 : 17). Even before a large ship's company, "he gave thanks to God in presence of them all" (27 : 35). He prayed for the brethren—"We pray always for you" (2 Thess. 1 : 11). "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy" (Phil. 1 : 4). "I make mention of you always in my prayers" (Rom. 1 : 9). "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you" (Col. 1 : 3), "night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face" (1 Thess. 3 : 10). He often asks the brethren to pray for him: "Brethren, pray for us" (2 Thess. 3 : 1; Heb. 13 : 18). "Strive with me in your prayers to God for me" (Rom. 15 : 30). "I trust, through your prayers, I shall shortly be given to you" (Philem. 22).

He makes it a matter of urgent exhortation that the brethren should give themselves to prayer: "Pray always with all prayer in the Spirit" (Eph. 6 : 18). "In everything, by prayer and supplication, let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4 : 6). "I will that men pray everywhere" (1 Tim. 2 : 8). "Pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. 5 : 17-18).

Paul's familiar communications with the brethren were tinged with the same spirit of godliness. There is no levity; no avoidance of allusions to the truth to conciliate unjustified men, the fear of whom bringeth a snare. He exemplified in himself the exhortation he gave to the brethren: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt . . . sound speech, that cannot be condemned . . . neither jesting nor foolish talking, which are not convenient, but rather giving of thanks." When he saw the brethren, on his journey towards Rome, "he thanked God and took courage" (Acts 28 : 15). His salutations are all divine. Examine every epistle: he brings God and Christ into all his greetings. Are we to follow Paul or the paganism of modern atheistic custom? Modern paganism will soon be swept from the face of the earth, and make way for the glory of the Lord, which will be inscribed even on the bells of the horses. If we conform to the world, we shall perish with the world. Our part—our duty—our wisdom is to conform to the image of the new man of which Christ has given us so abundant an example in Paul.

There are several other features. Paul was affectionately interested in the brethren. He writes to the Thessalonians: "Being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted to you not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye

SEASONS OF COMFORT

were dear unto us" (1 Thess. 2 : 8). This is a contrast to the social ideal of the nineteenth century, of which polite indifference is a prominent feature. It is considered weak to be affectionate, and small to be sympathetic. Men harden each other in pride, and miscall it by many fine names, which gloss over the monstrosity, and perpetuate a strained and tyrannous etiquette which blights the fruit of the Spirit. Paul represents a totally different school, *i.e.*, the school of Christ, who himself was meek and lowly, and not ashamed even of tears. He wept at the death of Lazarus ; he wept over Jerusalem ; he made supplication with " strong crying and tears " (Heb. 5 : 7). Paul also appears before us as a tender-hearted man moved frequently to tears. He " served the Lord with many tears " (Acts 20 : 19). He " ceased not to warn every one of the brethren, night and day, with tears " (verse 31). He wrote to the Corinthians " with many tears " (2 Cor. 2 : 4). He told the Philippians—even weeping in the act of writing—of false brethren, who were the enemies of Christ (Phil. 3 : 18). He was touched at the entreaties of the brethren, who sought to dissuade him from going, in the teeth of danger, to Jerusalem. He said, " What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart ? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus " (Acts 21 : 13). In this, also, we have an exhibition of his courage and enterprise in the service of Christ, as well as his susceptibility to tender emotion. The ideal brother of Christ, as represented in Paul, is not all head ; he is a tender-hearted loving man.

There may be many who are called brethren, through whom the truth is brought into reproach, who conform not at all to the Pauline standard. They are contentious without being faithful ; intelligent, without being loving ; courageous without being humble ; bold, without being reverent. They are self-assertive, without being regardful of others ; sensitive to human opinion, without the fear of God ; manly and resolute, without being sympathetic and considerate. Wise men will resist the influence of this class, and seek to neutralize it by the exhibition and assertion of the model Christ has given us in Paul. This model we have only partially outlined in the matters passed in review. It is in the power of everyone to make its closer acquaintance in the daily and attentive reading of Paul's most wonderful epistles. The details exhibited, however, present a sufficiently complete picture for practical purposes.

Summarizing them, we have found a man of good conscience and modest self-estimate ; yet of bold self-assertion when necessary ; an earnest, ardent, devoted, thorough-going friend and servant of Christ ; supremely, yea, exclusively interested in Christ's affairs on earth, for which he entertained an appreciation amounting to enthusiasm. We have found him a benevolent man, mindful of the needs of others ; interested in the brethren ; solicitous of their welfare, and compassionate of the poor. We have found him a man of sympathy, of affection, and of tenderness of heart, even to tears. We have found him, above all, a lover of God, a man of prayer, with constant recognition and regard for the will of God in

all his matters, and a constant exemplification of sobriety and godliness.

In these particulars we have a copy set before us by Christ to imitate. Shall we give up the attempt because it is difficult? Our copying may be blundering and blotted in the first stages; but with perseverance, like the children who pore over the desks at school, we shall find the progress grow easier with every effort, until, at last, we shall attain to a degree of approximation that may, at first, seem impossible. Let us remember that in the Master of the school, we have a merciful and faithful high priest, who knows our infirmities, and will make allowance for our shortcomings, if only we are attentive and diligent scholars. He ever liveth to make intercession for us; and in all our struggles with the old man within, and the seductive world without, having himself suffered, being tempted, he is able also to succour them that are tempted. Such is Paul's assurance to us (Heb. 2 : 18), who also says, in view of the very fact (4 : 16) : "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

The Example Of Israel's History

The privilege of knowing and believing the truth.—Its value now.—Clouds of tribulation.—The parable of the supper.—The guests first invited.—The streets and lanes.—The Father's work extended to the Gentiles.—The terms of our standing.—Many "ifs."—Example in the history of Israel.—The generation that came out of Egypt.—What has Paul to say as the apostle of the Gentiles?—Gentile believers have only become conditional fellow-heirs.—"Beware, lest thou forget the Lord."—Israel lost all interest in the service of God.—The state of things around us.—A State Church system.—Stagnation and death the order of the day.—Estimate the state of society at its true character.—The house of God a temple of holiness.—Brethren and sisters.—Saints unspotted from the world.—"The world passeth away."—The collapse of the prismatic-hued soap-bubble.—The horrors of the judgment process.—The toleration of the wicked for a season.—A fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.—The manifested "terrors of the Lord."

It is our undoubted privilege to be of the number of those who know and believe the truth. The value of this privilege will principally be manifest when the Lord, returned to the earth, shall proceed to the great and interesting work of making a selection from among such as have known his name for the everlasting and blessed association of the ages to come. But its value is a matter of experience, even now. Who that has apprehended, and accepted, and made daily companionship with "the glorious gospel of the blessed God,"

SEASONS OF COMFORT

does not feel that "godliness is profitable even for the life that is now"? It may not be profitable as regards eligibility for "getting on" among men; but as regards those mental conditions that make life desirable—as regards peace, satisfaction, hope, rational aim, friendship and purifying purpose—its profitableness is beyond question, when it finds congenial soil.

Especially at such a time as the present, do we experience the truth of this. The clouds of tribulation are gathering thick over the world, and men are everywhere wistfully scanning the still-threatening heavens. Such as know not the truth are liable to be heavy-hearted at the aspect of things around them. A contrary effect is experienced by those who have been taught to look at things as God sees them. They lift up their heads with a hopeful expectancy where the hearts of men in general fail them from fear. The increasing darkness is increasing comfort to those who are able to recognize it as the characteristic indication of the approach of the hour of judgment upon the Gentiles, and the manifestation of the glory of God to all the nations of the earth for their chastisement and blessing in Abraham.

How comes it that we are in this privileged position?—we, who by nature and historic extraction, are without an inheritance of hope? We learn the answer in the parable of the supper (Luke 14 : 17). The guests first invited—the men and women of the Israelitish nation—declined the proffered favour on various excuses. The master of the house, being angry, sent his servants into the streets and lanes of their polity to bring in the poor and maimed, the halt and the blind. The result was a partial filling of the tables; but the servants' report was, "Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room." The master of the house answered, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled." In obedience to this command, the servants went forth to call the Gentiles to the kingdom first offered to the Jews and accepted by only a few of them. Paul, one of those servants, said to the originally-invited guests: "Be it known unto you, that the salvation of God is sent to the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28 : 28). Jesus, in prospect of the result, said: "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven; but the children of the kingdom (the Jews, belonging to the kingdom by natural descent) shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." A Roman centurion's faith was the occasion of this allusion to the destined presence in the kingdom of God of many native-born Gentiles. He refers to them in the words: "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold (not of Israel after the flesh) them also I must bring . . . and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10 : 16). He prays for them also: "I pray not for these (the twelve) alone, but for them also that shall believe on me through their word" (17 : 20).

It is comforting thus to know that the Father's work in Christ extends to the Gentiles. Israel meanwhile and for a long season are

“blinded till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” (Rom. 11 : 25). They are given over to perversity because they knew not the time of their visitation. When the number of the called among the Gentiles is complete, God will return in favour to the people whom only He has “known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3 : 2). That will be a glorious event for the world. Through their fall, salvation came to the Gentiles. What good may not be expected from their rising again? So Paul enquires : “If the casting away of them be the reconciling of the (Gentile) world, what shall the receiving of them be but life from the dead?” (Rom. 11 : 15).

But we have not yet reached that glorious issue. Events are trembling on the verge of it, but the morning as yet lingers on the mountains. While we wait the vision, as commanded, though it tarry (Hab. 2 : 3), let us make profitable use of the delay. Let us consider the terms of our standing. Let us look again at the conditions of our call to inheritance amongst the fathers, for there is nothing more conspicuous in the apostolic expositions of the matter than this one feature, that our ultimate acceptance turns stringently upon an “if”—yea, many “ifs.” Whether it be Peter, James, John, Paul or Jude, the doctrine is uniformly that believers will only be chosen if they walk in the present evil world so as to please God (2 Pet. 1 : 8 ; Jas. 1 : 22-27 ; 1 John 3 : 7, 20 ; Gal. 6 : 8). Jesus also, as you know, constantly affirmed the same thing in various ways, of which Matt. 7 : 24-27 may be taken as a typical example.

Let us look for guidance in the direction where it is to be found. It is not fashionable to seek example on a question of this kind in the history of Israel. Yet this is where the apostles direct us to find it, and in truth it is where almost alone it is to be found. Paul enumerates incidents in that history and says : “These things happened unto them for examples ; and they are *written for our admonition*” (1 Cor. 10 : 11). He refers the Hebrews specifically to the failure of the whole generation that came out of Egypt under Moses and makes this application of it : “Let us therefore fear.” Jude refers to the same matter (verse 5). We cannot follow this cue in a more satisfactory manner than by taking the line of argument employed in Romans 11. It is the more satisfactory because it contains a direct application of the principles involved in the rejection of Israel and the call of the Gentiles.

“I speak to you Gentiles,” says Paul, “inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles.” What has he to say as the apostle of the Gentiles? Does he say, “As the apostle of the Gentiles I preach the divine brotherhood of all Gentiles everywhere and the fatherhood of God to all men”? Does he say, “Ye Gentiles are as much the heirs of promise as the Jews and more so, because the Jews have rejected their birthright”? Does he say, “I congratulate you, ye Gentiles, on the proud position of privilege and security to which you have attained, and in which you are established and exalted: I rejoice with you in the security of your calling and election: I call you to witness the great reversal in the providence of God by

SEASONS OF COMFORT

which ye have become the chosen of God, and the seed of Israel ; your humble suppliants to eat of the crumbs that fall from your table " ? Nay, nay, such is not the tenor of Paul's deliverances as the apostle of the Gentiles. They run in a contrary vein altogether, and we do well to mark the fact. He says, " If some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree ; boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well ; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear ; for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee . . . continue in his goodness ; otherwise thou also shalt be cut off." (Rom. 11 : 17-22). From this it follows, that we are not in a scriptural or acceptable attitude before God unless we recognize that we Gentile believers of the gospel have only become *conditional fellow-heirs* with the approved in Israel, and that apart from a deeply humble and eager observance of the conditions we have no hope at all. The observance of those conditions is called " continuing in his goodness," because the bestowal of the goodness is predicated upon our continuance in the conditions or in the rendering of that which He requires. It was because Israel had long ceased to render that which He required, that they were cut off.

What was it that He required of them ? Moses told them plainly : " What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul ? " (Deut. 10 : 12). As a nation, they failed to render this thorough and continual service. They did that against which Moses warned them when he told them to beware, when they would have attained to great wealth and plenty in the land to which God was taking them : " Beware lest thou forget the Lord, who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt " (Deut. 6 : 10-12). This is just what they did ; they forgot God, and they did so because they neglected the precaution which Moses enjoined upon them at the very same time, as the means of preventing forgetfulness : " These words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart ; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up " (verses 6, 7). Neglecting that of which the equivalent, in our day, is the daily reading of the word, they lost all interest in the exercises and institutions related to the service of God—an interest which can only exist where there is a lively recognition and a living interest in God, who requires them. They said : " Behold, what a weariness is it ! and they snuffed at it " (Mal. 1 : 13). Their state of mind led them to exclaim, " When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn ? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat ? " (Amos 8 : 5). They did observe the new moon : they did keep the sabbath,

in a way ; but they had more interest in temporalities ; and what they did, in the way of religious observance, was out of mere conformity to the custom around them. It was not done intelligently and lovingly to God. Thus God says to them, by Zechariah : " When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years (in Babylon), did ye at all fast unto me, even to me ? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did ye not eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves ? " (Zech. 7 : 5). If they took part in the work of the Temple, it was for gain. " Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought ? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand " (Mal. 1 : 10).

It will strike every one of a reflecting mind at all, that there is a wonderful resemblance to this sketch of Israel's condition, in the state of things around us. We have a State Church system—a nation professedly subject to God—going through, from time to time, a variety of ceremonies and exercises, nominally constituting a divine service, under the leadership of a hierarchy set apart for the business ; but where are those things that God required of Israel, and which he requires not less, but more, at the hands of Gentiles who may draw near to Him in the adoption offered through Christ, the seed of Abraham ? Where is the lively recognition of God ? Where is the unaffected love of His name, " with all the heart and all the soul " ? Where are the people, given to speak of the things of God when they sit in the house and walk by the way—whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditate in His law day and night ? Where are those who are more interested in the testimonies and the institutions of the Creator than in the buying and selling, and eating and drinking, and honouring and pleasuring of this animal condition of existence ? Where are those who, even if in an ignorant way, render sincerely to God the acts of their devotion ? Where are the men who open the doors of the truth and kindle its altar-fire without fee or reward, taking upon themselves the burden and the cost, the responsibility and the cross divinely associated, in this age of probation, with the service of the Father ?

They are not to be found as a class. There may be individuals, scattered here and there, who have aspirations and endeavours after a sincere service, even if " not according to knowledge," but even they are checked and repressed, and in most cases extinguished by the universal apathy, formalism, and man-seeking. They do not exist as a feature of the system. Stagnation and death are the order of the day. The fact is visible to all who have had their eyes sharpened by the Scriptures to discern the world as it appears in the light of the divine standard. It is not to be expected that any other state of things should be discoverable in the world which has been from the beginning the enemy of God ; least of all, at such a time as this, when " the harvest (of earth's wickedness) is fully ripe " for the Avenger's sickle. Yet it is well to refresh and renew our perceptions on the subject, that we may not be influenced to our destruction

SEASONS OF COMFORT

by the counsel of the wicked which surrounds us on every side. We cannot expect to find the characteristics of godliness in a society which is based upon "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life": let us, at all events, estimate the state of society at its true character, and not be corrupted by false views into a fatal assimilation to it. Let us not be of those who call good evil and evil good, the darkness light, and light darkness. Let the house of God, at all events, be a temple of holiness. Let brethren and sisters—saints of God—at all events, keep themselves unspotted from the world. Let them deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, at all events, and live soberly and righteously and godly in the present world, hoping and praying to be delivered from it, and only sojourning in it meanwhile as strangers and pilgrims, in patience, as part of their required probation.

Well may it be so; for what do we see when we face the facts? Why, that what John tells us is true—that "the world passeth away." Conciliate the world as you may; secure its favour in its best form; realize, in the most successful manner, its objects and its aims, its honours, and its comforts, its friendships and its fame—yea, "all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them"—to what does it all come? The collapse of the prismatic-hued soap-bubble in the hands of an admiring child, is not more complete than that which befalls the friend of the world when he is stretched on his back—six feet of cold clay. His glory shall not descend after him. "Though while he lived he blessed his soul; and men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself; he shall go to the generations of his fathers; they shall never see light. Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish." And who shall tell the horrors of the judgment process, by which, where responsible, he is chased away? While he lives in this time of liberty, he arrogantly appropriates and rejoices in the good that comes to his hand. He does not understand that God sends rain and sunshine without discrimination, for a purpose. He does not know that God "defers his anger for his name's sake" (Isa. 48:9), because He has a purpose which requires the toleration of the wicked for a season, that His people may be developed and prepared, and the earth's inheritance brought to fitness for their possession. He has not marked the voice of wisdom, which warns him by Solomon that, where responsible, as everyone is who "knows the right and yet the wrong pursues," "God shall bring every work into judgment with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil," namely, when "the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed" (Jude 14-15). They may comfort themselves, in their generation, with the idea that they may snatch from God, so to speak, a lifetime of lawless enjoyment, and then escape, sated, into a sweet oblivion. They will bewail their infatuation when they find themselves alive again, to experience the truth of what Paul tells us, that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God": that God is not mocked: and that

tribulation, wrath and anguish, await "every soul of man that doeth evil, in the day when God judges the secrets of men by Jesus Christ" (Heb. 10:31; Gal. 6:8; Rom. 2:9, 16). The end of these things is death; but the passage to death, through the terrors of the judgment period when the wrath of God will be poured out, without mixture or measure, will be an experience which the most adamant of men will feel to be a terrible price to have paid for the fleeting and very uncertain pleasures of negligence and indifference to God in the day of liberty and opportunity.

The day that witnesses these manifested "terrors of the Lord" will bring "glory, honour and peace" to every one who has patiently rendered to God what He requires at his hand. Have we not, therefore, every incentive to choose the things in which Jehovah delights, and to continue steadfast therein as long as He may appoint for us a continuance in the present evil state? Every wise man will say Amen, and will show his wisdom by acting in accordance with his excellent understanding.

Praise And Heart-Hardening

Praise not a mere sentimental rapture.—Founded on reason.—A great God.—He made all things.—The stupendous movements of the universe.—The beneficent march of the seasons.—The exquisite skill in the construction of plant and animal.—To God the ascription of all this wealth of wisdom and power.—“The deep places of the earth.”—Mighty crags.—Dizzy depths.—A mountain side.—A yawning gorge.—The strength of the hills.—“The great and dreadful God.”—The Psalm invites to praise.—Who gives the invitation?—The Messiah.—“In the midst of the church I will sing praise unto Thee.”—An outburst of praise such as has never been heard.—No technical pre-occupation with notes.—No mechanical unfeeling utterance of words.—Every mind aglow.—The days of our pilgrimage need not be praiseless days.—“Show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvellous light.”—Harden not your hearts.—The reproofs of the spirit.—A criterion.—A bad omen.—Within our volition to harden or not harden our hearts.—At a given moment absurd to say “change your state.”—A question of the influences steadily operating.—The reading of the holy oracles.—The morning and evening sacrifices of prayer.—Watering the seed sown by the word.—The assemblies of the saints.—The combined result of a wise mode of life.—The other side of the picture.—Settling gradually into a state of hopeless induration.—Treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath.—The Spirit's exhortation.

THE psalm read this morning (95) furnishes, as every portion of Scripture does, themes of profitable meditation. It opens with an invitation to praise: "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us

SEASONS OF COMFORT

make a joyful noise unto the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms." We are told in another psalm : " It is good to sing praises to our God, for it is pleasant, and praise is comely." In the psalm before us a reason is given for the invitation to indulge in this good thing. It is not a mere sentimental rapture, though sentiment and rapture have their fullest and most reasonable scope in the act of praise directed to God. It has a reason, and the reason is : " For the Lord is a great God." Another psalm, like many besides, indicates the nature and extent of the greatness : " By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth."

Let us open our minds to this great idea. It lies at the very root of the truth. It is the beginning of the gospel, the ground of our hope, the source of all true consolation. It is the end of salvation : for what do we find in all the delineations of the perfected state but praise as the foremost occupation—the highest delight of those who have part in it ? Of the apocalyptic four beasts, symbolic of Israel redeemed (and if we are saved we shall be incorporate with them), it is testified that " they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever, the four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power : for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

How reasonable is praise to God. He made us, and not we ourselves. He made all things. Do we admire the stupendous and well-ordered movements of the universe ? Are we impressed with the beneficent march of the seasons ? See we anything in the poise of the elements and the inimitable adjustment of the intricate forces of nature ? Or are we struck with the exquisite skill exhibited in the construction of the minutest fibre in plant or animal ? To man we can attribute nothing of all this power and all this wisdom. Man himself is a product of it. He is a helpless, if not an admiring, spectator. He cannot modify the fundamental laws around him, if he appreciate ever so little or desire ever so much. He can but manipulate (and that on a very small scale) the materials brought to his hand ; and these he can only use in subjection to already established laws and affinities which he is powerless to touch. To God we look with ascription of all this wealth of wisdom and power, and the contemplation of Him generates praise. If He fill heaven and earth by His Spirit—if thus He is near to every one of us—if all this mighty frame-work of visible existence around us is the concretion of the invisible energy of His Spirit—if every faculty we possess, and every idea we conceive, and every beauty we admire in the great work around us are traceable to the impress of His eternal wisdom on the materials He has provided and employed in the construction of

heaven and earth, is it not reasonable we should, like David, call upon all that is within us to bless His holy name?

An apparently curious theme of adoration is furnished in the psalm : " In his hand are the deep places of the earth : the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it : and his hands formed the dry land." Why should " the deep places of the earth " be mentioned more than the flat places or the wide places ? There seems to me a reason. If there is one time more than another when we are enabled to feel our own absolute insignificance, or tempted to doubt the power of God, it is when we have to do with the deep places of the earth. On the iron-bound coast, you peep over the mighty crags into the dizzy depths below, where ships are specks, and great rocks like very small stones on the strand ; or from a mountain side, you gaze down into a yawning gorge into which a single false step would precipitate you to destruction ; or in the mammoth underground caves of the American Continent, you wander with lantern light in miles of mazy darkness till at the end you come to a fathomless deep into which you throw stones that never reach the bottom, so far as you can make out from the sound—in such places and at such times there is a world of meaning in the words : " In his hand are the deep places of the earth." If in His hand are the deep places of the earth, we powerfully feel how great is He and how entirely and implicitly we are in His hand. So also with the strength of the hills. The great mountains overwhelm us with the idea of stupendous power ; if this strength is " His," how strong is He, as well as wise and kind. It is not without a meaning that the Scriptures speak of Him as " the great and dreadful God." His greatness is unsearchable. It is staggering to our poor capacities. We can but recognize it and yield the feeble tribute of our praise.

There is something to consider in the fact that the psalm before us invites us to praise. Who gives this invitation ? Well, doubtless, in the first instance, the invitation is David's ; but we must never forget that the Spirit of God spake by David, and that David, in the Psalms, personates the Son of David (the Messiah), as shown by the frequent application of the Psalms in this way by the Spirit in the Apostles. The psalm shadows forth the glorious invitation which the Captain of our salvation will address to all his brethren, and through them to all the world in the day of his manifestation. He has said, " In the midst of the church I will sing praise unto thee " ; and again, " My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation." The world has not yet seen this great sight, when the Lamb, in the midst of the symbolic 144,000—" the general assembly and church of the first-born "—will give the signal for an outburst of praise such as has never been heard upon the wings of the wind, in the history of the human race at all events. And such praise ! Every person in the assembly will take an enlightened and an efficient part. Every heart will be fully concentrated—" fixed " is the psalmodic phrase—on the high and holy object of it, who, though " above all blessing and praise," has declared His delight in the pure-hearted adoration of those whom He has made. There will be no such drawback as we

SEASONS OF COMFORT

experience now in our midst : there will be no drawing nigh with the mouth while the heart is far away. There will be no technical pre-occupation with notes ; no mechanical unfeeling utterance of words ; no mere musical, and sometimes unmusical, sounds from the throat. Every mind will be aglow with great thoughts of God ; every heart with the transport of admiration ; and every voice in full accord with those laws of musical harmony, which, with all other laws, are laws of God's own constitution. All who take part will have been changed from the mortal and the frail to the undying and the strong ; from the stunt and the incapacity and the weakness of the corruptible, to the strength and glory and efficiency of the spirit-nature, whose capabilities of enjoyment will be at their highest tension in the act of collective praise to the Eternal Father of all, of whom and to whom and through whom are all things.

We are looking forward to this feast of praise in the state described by Paul : " Made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who has subjected the same *in hope*." These are the days of our pilgrimage. But they need not be praiseless days. Nay, they must not be ; it is part of the calling to which we have been called to " render the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name." We are " a chosen generation—a peculiar people—a royal priesthood "—even now (1 Pet. 2 : 9), part of whose vocation it is to " show forth the praises of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvellous light." We are called upon to " Rejoice in the Lord," and to give expression to this joy in " psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." Paul and Silas in prison, in the darkness of the night, prayed to God and " sang praises, and the prisoners heard them " (Acts 16 : 25). The invitation of the psalm before us is an invitation to sing unto the Lord now : " To-day, if ye will hear his voice " (for these words form part of the psalm—verse 7), we are told to " harden not our heart," as Israel did in the wilderness. Now if we shut our hearts to the luxury of praise and the sweetness of prayer, are we not " hardening our hearts " ? Some people call this " singing and praying " " soft." Be it so : softness is the opposite of hardness ; and we are divinely warned against hardness. Because your popular superstition has run into one extreme, that is no reason why we should run into another. If men professing the truth are inaccessible to the feelings that find expression in praise, is it not a proof that they are in the very attitude deprecated here ? Paul directly applies the psalm to us in Heb. 3, and he applies it specifically on this question of heart-hardening. He says (verse 6) we are the house of Christ " if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end." Then, having quoted this psalm in illustration, and this part of it, " To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts," etc., he says, " Wherefore . . . take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To-day ; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin " (Heb. 7 : 12-13). Consequently, we listen to a divine exhortation, when we listen to any brother's warning against a hardened state of the

spiritual affections. No true man in Christ will dislike such warnings, if they are delivered in a benevolent and reasonable spirit ; for such a man sufficiently knows by experience the tendency of human nature even in the best of men to sink into this state. And he delights in the reproofs of the spirit. He feels like David : " Let the righteous smite me ; it shall be a kindness : and let him reprove me ; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head " (Psa. 141 : 5). It is possible for the truth to interest the intellect, while the affections are set upon things on earth. In such a case, even the intellect itself will soon cease to be charmed by the testimony, whereas to the mind whose affections are set on things above, the word of the Lord will always hold the very high place assigned to it in all the Psalms, wherein it is declared to be more necessary than food : sweeter than honey : more valuable than piles of the precious metals.

A man's relation to this question of " praise " is almost a criterion of his whereabouts as to the " hardening " deprecated in the psalm. If he has no delight in the direction of praise, it is a bad omen, and one demanding his particular attention. It is a remarkable feature that this hardening of the heart is spoken of as a matter subject to our will. The exhortation " harden not your heart " implies that it is within our volition to some extent to harden or not harden our hearts. This would seem as if it were contrary to truth. The truth would seem to be that if a man's heart is hard, it is so by a constitution which it is beyond his power to alter ; and that to exhort him not to harden his heart, is like exhorting him to change the colour of his hair or the height of his stature. The truth, however, is not altogether according to the appearance of things. The state of the heart, like the state of the body, is pretty much a question of treatment. If man cleanse, nourish, and exercise the body, health, vigour and symmetry are the results. If a man neglect these, wanness and weakness come instead. Consequently, though at a given moment, it might be absurd to say to a man in the latter state, " Change your state," as regards the result possible by a certain line of action, it would not be so absurd as it would seem. So in this other case, the state of our minds is a question of the influences to which we subject them. We may harden them in a divine direction by neglect of divine things, or by exercising them in merely natural things. It is here where the reasonableness of the exhortation appears. It is here where responsibility rises as to the state of our hearts.

A man realizing this will see the wisdom of regularly setting apart at least 20 minutes a day for the reading of the holy oracles. This reading is the greatest antidote in the present dispensation for the heart-hardening which is common to all men by nature. Next to it comes the morning and evening sacrifice of prayer—oftener, like David and Daniel, if the heart so frame, but at least thus often. This, like a watering of the seed sown by the word, will help that bringing forth the fruit thereof by which the Father is glorified. Then there are the assemblies of the saints enjoined by the word, which are a great help in the same direction. Next, there is nothing like

the actual performance of well-doing for quickening of the heart towards God, and keeping us in a right frame and attitude. Let a man accustom himself to doing good—let him ponder his daily surroundings in the light of the commandments of Christ, and aim to adapt himself to those surroundings in accordance with those commandments, and he will be wonderfully helped. The combined result of this mode of life will be realized in a state of continual mental sympathy for divine ideas and things, otherwise expressed in apostolic phrase as being “conformed to the image of the Son of God.” It is, in fact, the growth of the new man, after the image of Him who has begotten him by the word. The outward man may perish from many causes, but by such a course, this inward man will be renewed from day to day, and manifest his increasing vigour by the increasing burden we shall feel with the present sinful state of things, and increasing desire for the change that is to be brought unto us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The other side of the picture is to be seen in that opposite course which certainly brings a hardness of heart for which a man will be held responsible. In this opposite course, the man neglects the reading of the word. He does not absolutely leave the Bible unread but he adopts no system ; he does it at haphazard, as time and inclination may suit. The consequence is, it is never very convenient, and never very enjoyable. The affairs of this life are always exacting, and he always accords to them the first claim. Bible reading is attended to at odd times, when he has nothing else particularly to do—perhaps on a Sunday afternoon occasionally, when he is heavy, or on a weeknight, when he is tired out with a day’s work. It becomes more and more occasional, as time goes on, until it is practically shelved altogether. By and by, he wonders if the Bible is true, and becomes finally perhaps an easy prey to the shallow objections of a very superficial and unprincipled scepticism. If he does not exactly sink to this depth, he hangs on, a dead branch—a weight and a grief of mind to those who are flourishing on the sap of the true vine. This man, whose delight is not in the law of the Lord, soon ceases to pray. He is tired at night, and he is in a hurry in the morning, and he does not see any particular use in praying. And so in the habitual absence of this opening and subduing and sanctifying act of the mind, his carnal heart settles gradually into a state of hopeless hardness. The meetings he thinks are all very well in their place, and he is easily kept at home ; and as for bringing the precepts of Christ to bear on daily surroundings, he will be heard to whisper that religion should be kept in its own place. Money-making, by any means, is his charm ; and he will be found standing in the way of sinners, and sitting in the seat of the scornful, and prominent in all pleasure-taking, and condescending even to worse follies in which he “does not see any harm.” His heart is hardened, and he has hardened it ; and in the hardness of his impenitent heart, he is treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to every man according to his deeds.

Brethren, be it ours to listen to the Spirit's exhortation to harden not our hearts as in the day of Israel's provocation. Let us obey the other exhortation which says, "My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart. For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh. Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life. . . . For the ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings. His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins. He shall die without instruction; and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray."

Wisdom Different From Science Or Philosophy

Meeting under the auspices of wisdom.—What is wisdom?—Minor applications.—The world's pretensions.—The world's wisdom in the nineteenth century.—The experimental schools of modern times.—No power to deliver us from evil.—Life as at present manifested in the world.—Doing that which is for the best.—What is the best possible?—We have it in Christ.—The proffered goodness of God.—Attainable only in the channel of faith.—Time valuably invested.—Knowledge all on the surface.—Natural phenomena.—The everlasting Power.—Standing inside creation.—The Greeks perished.—Paul sleeps.—Paul will step forth.—Glad some power and knowledge.—Nature from its divine side.—Becoming a fool in the estimation of the wise.—The wise so-called.—A fool so-considered.—The beginning of wisdom.—Endless life in the ages to come.—The delights of efficient life.—A wise man's soliloquy.

OUR meeting this morning (as every meeting we hold in pursuance of scriptural objects) is a compliance, in a certain way, with the divine injunction which says: "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore, get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding." We meet under the auspices and for the further attainment of wisdom. But what is wisdom? We may profitably ask this question, and spend a few moments in the contemplation of the full and certain answer which the truth supplies. To appreciate the value of the answer, let us look at the state of the subject apart from the truth.

The word wisdom has, of course, many minor applications. It may be spoken of in connection with any state of circumstances calling for action. In such and such a line of action we may say there is no wisdom, or that there is great wisdom in such and such another line of action. Wisdom, in this case, is limited to the particular interest or object involved in the circumstances—as in taking steps to avoid the plague or stave off a riot, or in smaller matters, to preserve health or secure a good business. But this morning we look at a larger application of the word. We look at it in relation to the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

ultimate, the eternal results of a man's life—1, as affecting God ; 2, as affecting the man himself ; and 3, as affecting a man's neighbour. The question is, What is wisdom in this broad relation ?

The world has always made considerable pretensions to the possession of wisdom in this particular and important bearing. It is a pretension by no means peculiar to our day. The apostolic age was pre-eminent in this respect, as is evident from the allusions in Paul's epistles and in some other parts of the New Testament. He says his preaching was "not with enticing words of man's wisdom." He admits having set forth wisdom, "yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to naught." He recognized that "the Greeks sought after wisdom," but what had it all come to ? "Where is the wise ?" he asks. "Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world ?" He plainly says, "The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God," and makes this very incisive application of the fact : "If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise."

Many will be prepared to admit the force of all this as applicable to the false science and philosophy of 1,800 years ago, who may have a reservation in favour of the world's wisdom in the nineteenth century. They may suppose that Paul would not have written of modern science as he wrote of Greek speculation. They may have a feeling to the effect that, in our day at all events, it has ceased to be true that the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God. In this there is greater mistake than may at first sight appear. There is doubtless an accurate knowledge of the constitution of nature in all her aspects which did not exist in Paul's day. Science is more truly knowledge in our day than then, notwithstanding a wonderful amount of speculation in its higher applications. Still "wisdom" is no more a characteristic of the experimental schools of modern times than of the speculative schools of Athens. Wisdom is more than knowledge. It comprehends knowledge but it is the right use of knowledge rather than knowledge itself. A man might understand the chemistry of farming, and be the vagabond of the village. Another man, with less knowledge, who industriously tilled the soil, would be the wiser man of the two.

The question is, what is scientific knowledge capable of doing for us, and how is the scientific knowledge used ? The answer to this will bring modern learning as much under Paul's disparagements as the wisdom of the Greeks. In the first place, it has no power to deliver us from the evil state in which we live. A man might understand all the mysteries of the universe without being a whit nearer salvation than the ignorant. His knowledge would merely be a knowledge of what exists, and a knowledge of this may be of service as regards present convenience and health ; but it cannot be turned to any account in changing a man's own constitution and averting the law of death, which overshadows all life, as at present manifested in the world. Professor Clifford died a few weeks ago at 35 or 36. He was a rising man ; but his great natural knowledge and popular estimation were powerless to turn away the dishonour of death, or stay the

WISDOM DIFFERENT FROM SCIENCE OR PHILOSOPHY

decomposition that compelled sorrowing friends to bury the pale corpse out of sight.

Wisdom may be defined as the doing of that which is for the best. But let us understand this. It is not doing that which we may intend for the best, but that which *is* for the best. A man's intentions may be amiable enough, but "there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14 : 12). And by the best we mean the best possible, and not that which we may think the best. This involves the question, what is the best possible? Notions on this subject will vary with every human whim and fancy. Obviously, we want a fixed standard. We have it in Christ. He exemplifies to us, and instructs us by his apostles as to the best possible. He shows in himself, and offers to us the perfection of being, intrinsically, and in all its relations. He shows to us that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested in the Son to the apostles, and by them reflected to us, through their teaching. We need not discuss whether he is true. The question is in reality not an open one. It stands in one position only—a self-manifest position of undeniable truth. Our assembly this morning around the emblems of a crucified Saviour shows that we recognize this. What if others falter and doubt and deny and blaspheme? There have always been such, and they usually and largely include such as are high in the wisdom of this world. Jesus actually gave thanks on this behalf: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight." Instead, therefore, of feeling perturbed at the scepticism of the learned, we ought to recognize it as a necessary feature of the situation. The "wise and prudent," while sharp enough in natural things, are "too wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight" to discern the final goodness of God on the conditions which He requires—conditions which humble man and exalt God. The simplicity of belief, the dependence of faith, the humility of obedience, are all repugnant to their intellectual modes and instincts which lead them to prefer ways and thoughts that involve human headship, and provide scope for human importance and gratification. Such men are unfit for the final goodness of God, which requires that God may be glorified, and God's way hides it from them.

We are here this morning rather as "the babes," to whom Jesus says the Father hath revealed His precious intentions. It is ours to humble ourselves as little children, accepting in gratitude and rejoicing in the proffered goodness of God. But though children, Paul says, "in understanding, be men."

In the exercising of our understanding, then, we look at the fact that the best that is possible, and the only permanent good that there is for any, is the gift of an immortal nature at the appointed time of Christ's return to the earth, and incorporation in a system of society in which intelligence, faculty, health, wealth, and opportunity will combine to confer the conditions of perfectly blessed existence on the basis of permanence. We look also at the fact that this is attainable

only in the channel of faith in what has been revealed concerning Christ, and obedience to what he has commanded. We then turn to the scientific systems of the day, and we ask whether they are not as lacking in wisdom as ever Paul pronounced the philosophies of the Greeks to be? If wisdom is the attainment of the highest good, where is the wisdom of a system that not only has no power to bestow good, but that would actually turn away our regard from that which has? Knowledge is all very good in its place; but it is possible to have a knowledge that the process of time will deprive of all value; and the time bestowed in the acquisition of it is thrown hopelessly away. And especially is this true of modern systems of science that tacitly deny Christ. "One thing is needful" in this matter, as Jesus said to Martha. There is knowledge that a man can do without; but there is a knowledge that a man must have. A man must know God and the Lord Jesus Christ; and he must know and engrave upon his mind the knowledge of what line of thought and action will commend him to their approbation. Time spent in obtaining this knowledge is valuably invested. Ultimately, it will include even all that the children of this world's wisdom pride themselves on. Their knowledge is all on the surface of things. They are content to know natural phenomena, but to natural phenomena there is a foundation. They admit this foundation, but call it "unknowable." So it is, to human investigation. But this great and unsearchable foundation—the Rock—the everlasting Power—has revealed Himself, and the gospel connects us with Him. Here is where a simple believer of the gospel is far wiser than the man laden with the technicalities and the honours of science. He stands inside creation, so to speak, while the man of science is on the outside. The man in Christ is related to the power that can affect and effect the developments of the universe; while the man of science, rejecting Christ, merely sees what exists for the time being, without any power to affect it, or any relation to what God means to effect. The man in Christ may be ignorant of the technicalities of human knowledge; but he possesses a knowledge of far more value in knowing God, and having a place in His love, for this is the ultimate source of all knowledge and power.

Where are the Greeks who disputed with Paul, saying, "What will this babbler say?" You would search creation in vain to find them. In due course they went the way of all flesh. If they were not burnt to ashes according to ancient modes of sepulture, they were laid in the all-devouring grave, and by this they have been eaten and so thoroughly digested that not a fibre could be discovered of which you could say, "This belonged to them." Their knowledge and their presumption have perished with them. But Paul sleeps "in Christ," which is a very different thing. Paul is in the grave, to be sure, but Christ is in heaven, and Paul is a reality to the mind of Christ; and when Christ, endowed with all-controlling power in heaven and in earth, arrives in this part of the boundless dominions of the Father, who has "given him power over all flesh to give eternal life to as many as" belong to him, the exercise of his power will re-organize the scattered dust of Paul, and Paul will step forth

WISDOM DIFFERENT FROM SCIENCE OR PHILOSOPHY

unhurt by his long sleep, to realize the result of his faith and labour in a physical invigoration which he never experienced in the days when he groaned, being burdened. Gladsome power will come with his investiture with immortality, and to him, in due course, will be opened that storehouse of knowledge at the doors of which the children of this scientific world are merely clamouring in vain. He will then "know even as he is known." He will know as God knows. He will see nature from its divine side; he will recognize all its phenomena; discern the aim of its operations; measure its forces—estimate their play, and be able to regulate their action as God may permit. He will look round in vain for the philosophers who encountered him, saying, "What will this babbler say?" For it is written, "The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead." With a new force Paul will be able to ask: "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" And what will be true of Paul will be true of ourselves if we walk in wisdom's ways. We shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, when the scientific glare of the age in which we live shall have been eclipsed in the glory of Christ.

To walk in these ways requires that a man make up his mind meanwhile to be considered a fool; because the wisdom of God is esteemed foolishness by the world, and the man a fool who embraces it. A truly enlightened man will be able to bear the reproach gladly, because he knows that in becoming a fool in the estimation of the wise of this world, it is as Paul puts it, "that he may be wise." True wisdom is all on the side of those who submit to God. When Paul speaks of the "foolishness of preaching," and "the foolishness of God," it is not that he admits foolishness as attaching to either: it is an accommodation to the language of men who think so. When he says, "Where are the wise?" he means the wise so-called, but who are really foolish; for as he quotes from the Scriptures, "the Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise that they are vain." "He brings to nothing the understanding of the prudent." When his advice concerning a man is, "Let him become a fool," he means a fool so-considered—not a fool in reality, for the man who becomes a fool in the estimation of the world by submission to the requirements of God as revealed in the Gospel, becomes, in reality, a wise man for the first time. Let the scorners scorn as they may, it is a fact that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." The man who does not fear God is a fool, however much he may know of the works of God; for his knowledge of the works of God is of no use to him if he know not God himself. To God, he is merely a presumptuous gossiper about God's property. His disappearance from the face of the universe is only a question of time—and that a very short time. Whereas, the man who knows God in the affectionate submission He requires, may be ignorant of the works of God in nature (and where is the man who knows the millionth part of these?) and he is yet a very wise man, for he is on the high road to the highest good. Even the things on which the wise of this world plume themselves will

SEASONS OF COMFORT

become his unbounded possession. Endless life and boundless opportunity secured in Christ, he will have ample time in the ages to come to learn all the marvels of the universe, great and small, while he will have power to study and understand them to an extent that the wisest of mortals has not even dreamt of, and capacity to apply them, and develop their objects and resources in the delights of truly efficient life, such as mortal has never yet tasted.

Meanwhile, wisdom and folly are not palpably manifest. The one seems the other. Be it ours to discern the one from the other. It is not difficult to do this when a man is in earnest. Christ is wisdom concentered for us, so to speak. To let the world of Christ dwell in us richly, is to let wisdom dwell. To get Christ is to get wisdom. Let us write this down, each man for himself, once for all, as a thing not to be questioned or deviated from in the least degree. It will supply a simple and safe rule of action in all circumstances. A man will be able to say to himself, "If I get Christ, I get all—health, life, riches, honour, knowledge, joy, and every conceivable and (to us meanwhile) inconceivable good. How can I get him? I read and I find my answer. I am to love him and obey him. To do this I must adopt that course of action that will help me to do so, and avoid that course of action that will interfere with my doing so. I cannot love him if I forget him, nor obey his commandments if they fail my memory. I must therefore read of him continually, and call to mind his commandments always. I must consider him in all I do. I must keep the company of his friends. I must avoid the friendship of his enemies. I must suffer with him in the self-denial he requires. I must refuse to enjoy the pleasures of sin, which constitute the pursuits of the present evil world. I must spend the time of my sojourning here in fear. I must speak of him and show him forth in my day and generation even as a lit candle at night gives light to the house. I must live as his steward, and consider his interest and mine identical. He prayed: I will. He did always the thing that pleased the Father: I will try. He went about doing good: I will strive to follow his example. The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister: aspiring to a place among his many brethren, conformed to a common image, I will endeavour to act on the same principle, to follow the same rule. And if the way be narrow, and the labour toilsome, and the endurance trying to flesh and blood, I know it is not for long; for life is but a speeding shadow, a short story, a vanishing flower; and if I make use of it to obtain a place with Christ in the eternal and blessed ages beyond, I shall act the part of wisdom, which says to me, 'He that saveth his life shall lose it; but he that loseth his life for my sake, the same shall find it.'"

Judgment And Salvation

Stated readings of the Scripture.—The best way of speaking to the edification of the hearers.—“ Making a speech.”—Sermonizing.—Self-evolution.—Powerless to build the mind in the things of God.—A chapter on Moab.—Calamity and broken hearts.—The causes that led to judgment on Moab operative to-day.—Will bring judgment on the world at large.—The modern Moabites.—The other side of the question.—Joy, love, and expectation.—The friendship without respect of persons.—The qualifications.—To be learnt in the revealed word alone.—Do His will.—Judge not.—Judge ourselves.—Not distress ourselves about election.—What He has revealed.—Hear and come.—The fact of coming a proof of our inclusion among those given.—Be sure about the “ coming.”—It means much.—Those who walk in sin.—Now are we the sons of God.—Christ’s interest.—No parallel to it in human experience.—The love of God.—In Christ.—Brought to a personal focus.—Not cunningly-devised fables.—The realities of sober truth.—Living or dying.—Constantly imminent hope.—“ The love of Christ.”—A joyful sound.—A necessity even now.—Life as it now is.—God’s written invitation on the glowing page of Scripture.—A patient continuance in well-doing.—The way hard.—Prayer to the God of Israel.—Fellow-sufferers.—A gnawing worm at all hearts.—A cloud on all mortal things.—Existence without God.—In the truth reconciled.—Happier in our activity, more interest in existence.—The glory of our standing.

WE do well to have fixed and stated readings of the Scripture at this breaking of bread. It is the best foundation for every assembly of the saints. The best thing we can do at all our meetings is to let our minds rest on the portions that may be read. The best thing any one can do who desires to speak to the edification of the hearers is to employ what has been read as the basis of what he has to say. Let him endeavour to develop, amplify and illustrate this, and he will speak to profit ; whereas, if he seek to “ make a speech,” in the usual sense of the phrase, he will be in danger of pouring out a weak watery mixture of his own compounding that will give no nutriment. Sermonizing is of course quite out of the question. This is only speech-making in the clerical shape—a worse shape than the ordinary shape. Speech-making of all ordinary sorts is a mere process of self-evolution—a spinning of one’s own thoughts, which are weak and colourless and powerless to build the mind in the things of God. We may as well try to make bread without flour as try to speak to edification without the ideas of God so abundantly supplied to us in the word of truth.

We have them in various shapes in the readings this morning. We have a chapter on Moab written in blood—“ the burden of Moab ”—all calamity and broken hearts : “ In their streets they shall gird themselves with sackcloth : on the tops of their houses, and

SEASONS OF COMFORT

in their streets, everyone shall howl, weeping abundantly. . . . The waters of Dimon shall be full of blood" (Isa. 15 : 3, 9). For what reason was this visitation of judgment to come? Why is it written, "Moab is spoiled, and gone up out of her cities, and his chosen young men are gone down to the slaughter"? Why is it written, "Judgment is come . . . upon all the cities of the land of Moab, far or near"? The answer is as clear as the description of her calamities: "This shall they have for their pride" (Zeph. 2 : 10). "We have heard of the pride of Moab; he is very proud: even of his haughtiness, and his pride, and his wrath" (Isa. 16 : 6). "Make ye him drunken, for he magnified himself against the Lord: Moab also shall wallow in his vomit, and he shall also be in derision. For was not Israel a derision unto thee?" (Jer. 48 : 26). The judgment foretold became in due time the judgment accomplished; and you may now read, in the silent wastes of Moab's once populous valleys, the truth of Jehovah's word.

What have we to do with this subject? Just this: the causes that led to judgment on Moab are operative around us in all the world to-day. Pride and haughtiness and arrogance, and contempt of Israel and all things divine; covetousness, avarice, indifference to right, the treading down of the weak, the disregard of the poor, and the ignoring of the commandments of God prevail in the Christendom of our times as much as ever they did in Moab, and it is an eternal truth that like causes produce like effects. That which brought judgment on Moab will bring judgment on the world at large. It is revealed that it is to be so. The work of Christ at his coming is a work of judgment. So we are informed in the apocalyptic words that speak of him as "treading the winepress of the wrath of God"; in the apostolic intimation, that when revealed from heaven, it will be "in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God"; and in the oft-made prophetic announcement of his arrival as the name of the Lord from far, "burning with his anger . . . his lips full of indignation, and his tongue as a devouring fire." Seeing that this is the uncontradictable truth, what ought our position in the world to be? Ought we to be friends and partakers with a generation ripening for the judgment sickle of the Divine reaper? Ought we to be one and the same with the modern Moabites who despise God, have Israel in derision, and surfeit arrogantly in earth's plenty, as if it were theirs? Ought we not to "keep ourselves unspotted from the world"? to "walk in wisdom towards them that are without"? as "strangers and pilgrims, to pass the time of our sojourning here in fear"? knowing that the friendship of the world now will mean the enmity of God in the day when the thunders of the judgment-storm begin to peal throughout the world, when "the lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day"?

The reading from the apostolic writings reminds us of the other side of the question. It reminds us that our relation to the day of the Lord, as the brethren of Christ, is not one of fear, but of joy and

love and expectation. The idea is expressed in the hymn we sometimes sing, which is itself but the versification of a statement in the prophet Isaiah :—

O, say to the fearful, Be strong of heart ;
 He comes in vengeance, but not for thee ;
 For thee he comes, his might to impart
 To the trembling heart and the feeble knee.

This comfort is ours if we have made it such. The friendship of Christ is without respect of persons, though with great respect of character. It is remarkable how emphatically and frequently he uses the pronoun “whosoever”—absolutely *whosoever*. “Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.” “Whosoever shall do the will of my Father, the same is my brother and sister and mother.” “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” The coming vengeance is not for us if we are among the “whosoever.” This is the point on which we must continually judge ourselves. Do we comply with the qualifications required of the “whosoever” class? Obviously we cannot answer this question without acquaintance with the qualifications, and this acquaintance we can only acquire in habitual intimacy with the word. The qualifications are briefly condensed by Jesus into the words, “Whosoever shall *do the will* of my Father who is in heaven.” It is a question of doing what God desires us to do. It is a question of “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” We cannot learn this by studying science; we cannot learn it by our own reasoning and speculation; we cannot learn it in the works of men. It is to be learnt in the revealed word, and there alone; and when learnt, has to be put into practice with all docility and simplicity and diligence. “Whosoever” does this may look with comfort to the day of vengeance. Doubtless the Lord knows who these are, as it is written, “The Lord knoweth them that are his.” “I know my sheep, and am known of mine”; but *we* do not know—that is, we do not know in the personal sense. We know that none are His that do not do His will, and that all are His that do; but in discriminating between the one and the other, we may make mistakes. We need not seek particularly to perform this discrimination, except as regards ourselves. As regards others, it is our duty to “judge not”; as regards ourselves, it is a matter of command and a matter of common wisdom to “prove our own selves.” In a sense, like Paul, we cannot judge ourselves: “He that judgeth us is the Lord”; but we can stand guard over ourselves; we can subject ourselves to a continual self-scrutiny on the question whether we walk in accordance with the revealed will of the Father. In this sense: “If we judge ourselves we shall not be judged,” for the Lord will have no censure for those who correct themselves continually by the word. If by this process we bring ourselves into harmony with the Father’s mind, having the answer of a good conscience, we need not distress ourselves on the question that has plagued some—whether we are among the Father’s chosen.

This destination is not decided arbitrarily. It is true the Father’s purpose is the foundation of it, and that those are all foreknown to

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Him who are to be the subjects of it. It is nevertheless equally true that the mode of realizing that purpose is by the gospel preached and proposed for the willing faith and obedience of all who hear it. There can be no clash between the one thing and the other. The Father's counsels are inscrutable to us, but what He has revealed with regard to them is our property. His revelation in this matter is that He willeth not the death of a sinner, but would rather that he should turn and live ; that " every one that thirsteth " is invited, and will be made welcome to the living waters ; that " whosoever will " may come. If, then, we thirst and drink, if we hear and come, we may dismiss the question of whether we are included among those who are foreknown, for the one fact is the form and guarantee of the other. The two things cannot be separated. Our whole anxiety should be directed to our side of the question. Listen to the divine invitation and all is well. Jesus truly says, " All that the Father giveth me shall come to me," but he adds, " and him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out " (John 6 : 37). Consequently, the fact of coming to Christ is proof of our inclusion among those given to him. There can be no such thing as a man coming to Christ and being excluded from those given to him in the Father's plan. The one is an evidence and a means of the other. The whole question of importance for us is in the " coming." Do we " come " ? If so, all is well, and cannot but be well. We need not trouble about anything else. Nothing, in that case, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Only let us be sure about the " coming." It means much. It means the knowledge of Christ, of course, for this is the first step ; but it means much more. A man who knows, but does not love, has not come. A man who knows and loves, but does not obey, deceives himself in thinking he loves. A man who knows, loves, and obeys ; that is, who continues in " all things " prescribed for disciples to do and continue doing, has come, and will in no wise be cast out. There may be mistakes, shortcomings and offences on the part of such, but these are foreign to the main current of their lives, and there is forgiveness for them. Christ's priesthood has no other meaning. He is High Priest over his own house. He ever liveth to make intercession for them. He makes requests for brethren whom he loves, and the Father hears him, and is faithful and just to forgive all of whom the appointed High Priest thus makes mention. " If we walk in the light, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." Those who walk in sin have no representative in Christ. Those who are born of God sin not ; that is, they are not unrighteous in their habit of mind and action : their failures are exceptions to the habitual run of their lives, and, confessed and repented of, they are forgiven, and they stand at the last before the judgment seat to be proclaimed as constituents of the one body, " having neither spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing," of whom it is testified in the language of figure, that they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb ; that is, they are forgiven for Christ's sake, who shed his blood.

It is our privilege to stand related to this glorious position, if having obeyed the truth, we walk in it. This is the meaning of our meeting round this table. Even now are we the sons of God—even now are we forgiven—even now do we stand in the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Let us open our minds to this great fact. Christ's interest is great in all who stand accepted in him. It is no ordinary interest. There is no parallel to it in human experience. We know something of friendship between man and man—in some cases attaining a very ardent development—but here is a friendship of one for many, and that of a strength that never burnt in human bosom before. Paul speaks of it as "the love of Christ that passeth knowledge." For one to love a multitude with a love that shall be personal to each individual in the multitude, and that shall glow with equal ardour for all, is certainly a love passing human knowledge. Such a love is an impossibility in fragile human nature. It requires the strength of the spirit, compassing all and sustaining its own fire with the inexhaustible fuel of the divine energy. It is the love that exists in Christ and glows for ever towards his brethren. It is the love of God : God is love, and Christ is His glory in manifestation. We see the exquisiteness of the divine wisdom in the finished workmanship of creation around us ; we see something of His exhaustless beneficence in the manifest design of all things to confer goodness ; but we see these in Christ as they are nowhere else to be seen. They are here brought to a personal focus, and directed towards us in the pledge of unutterable well-being in due time. It is something for us to ponder, to rest on, to be comforted by, to admire. It is a glorious reality—the most glorious reality in creation—made ours in the gospel. It is a great possession now, though by faith only ; but what shall it be when we stand before the presence of his glory, to receive its healing effulgence in the company of the mustered friends of God of every age, and in the presence of a countless host of angelic spectators ? These things are not "cunningly-devised fables," though so gorgeous. They are the realities of sober truth, though hidden from the eyes of man for a necessary reason. They will burst upon our delighted vision by-and-by. It is only a question of time—and of a short time at the longest. The announcement of the Lord's arrival may any day hurry us into their presence, or the fall of death's curtain on our path may at any time, as with the wave of a magician's wand, conjure us away in a moment from the horrors of this evil state, and show us the manifold glories of the divine purpose in the presence of Christ returned. In this sense, living or dying, our position is a position of constantly imminent hope. Living or dying, we are the Lord's ; and to be His, we are related to the glories of the great salvation which transcend the wildest dreams of the most imaginative of poets, and beggar all human speech to convey an adequate idea of them. They are well named by Paul "the unsearchable riches of Christ." It is only a sober fact that it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive of them. God hath revealed them by His spirit ; but, for all that, the vision of them in great measure lies latent in the words that

SEASONS OF COMFORT

convey them, and remains invisible to millions who have the words but discern them not.

To the common run, "the love of Christ" is but a phrase—a theological phrase—a collocation of words that jingles drily in the ear, and suggests nothing more interesting than pews and pulpits and weary hours. To the ear of enlightened intelligence, it is a joyful sound, to know which makes a people palpably blessed. It represents the most precious fact in the universe. What is a man without the love of Christ—if Christ regard him not? Only a superior animal dragging out a sluggish existence which, by and by, must end in darkness under the grave-digger's spade. The love of Christ is a necessity even now, as that "uplifting ideal" which Professor Tyndall acknowledges man requires, but which he cannot find in nature. A man may think he can do without it: so he can, as the famine-stricken peasantry of Egypt can do without food. He can do without it and famish; he can do without it and die. He can get through life as it now is, consumed and deteriorated by the reigning vanity, and eligible for a properly certificated burial in some picturesque cemetery, in which the birds will twitter and the flowers will blow, in total indifference to his finished life and to his sepulchred remains. A man of true reason cannot thus be content with "vanity and vexation of spirit." If there were nothing else, he would try to reconcile himself to his wretchedness. But with God's written invitation on the glowing page of Scripture he cannot, he will not, he dare not, hold the love of Christ cheaply. Despised love will turn to appalling hatred in the day of "the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men."

The love of Christ is even now an ennobling blessing; but how shall it be estimated when it becomes visible to all men as the effectual means of physical renovation, the gateway to riches, honour, power, gladness, strength, and immortality? Every one will place the right value on it then, if they never did before. But many will awake to a realization of it when it is too late. "Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." It is while these things are yet all a matter of faith that God is pleased to enable us to acquire a right to their possession in the day of the manifested tree of life. This is why we are assembled this morning. God has asked at our hand "a patient continuance in well-doing." He has enlightened us as to the nature of what He considers well-doing. He commands us to "be not weary in this well-doing;" and we advantage ourselves and do honour to Him in this weekly assembly to listen to His voice. We require to be continually strengthened in our endeavours. The way is hard, and, as in the journeyings of Israel in the wilderness, "the soul of the people" is liable to be "discouraged because of the way." How can we hold up against it but by recollection of the promises and by prayer to the God of Israel—the God who covenanted the promises—the God who made us and who knows all our difficulties and infirmities; that He would strengthen our heart in the endurance of the darkness that covers all the earth, and in the performance of the difficult part which He has asked at our hands!

It is helpful to recollect the fact referred to by Paul, when he says, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man" (1 Cor. 10 : 13). At the worst, we are only fellow-sufferers with the common stock of which we form a part. As the brethren of Christ looking for his appearing, and striving to qualify ourselves for that event by the self-denial of all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we are not worse off than those whose portion is in this life, and to whom the great and precious promises of God are as the mere froth of fanaticism. Nay, we are much better off than they even now. It is in many senses true that "godliness hath profit both for the life that now is and for that which is to come." There is no true happiness in the world. With all the fuss and the show of importance, with all the colour and apparent zest of pleasure-following, with all the display and the honouring of one another, there is a gnawing worm at the heart. Only the young are delighted, and they but for a short time. A cloud settles on all mortal things for the blithest and the most spirited. It must be so. Though disfigured, we are in the image of the *elohim* as a race. We are mentally constituted for friendship with God. It is impossible we can have peace and joy in alienation from Him. "Vanity and vexation of spirit" must come of all attempts to employ existence without Him. The world is not happy : it cannot be. It is of the Lord that the people weary themselves in the fires of vanity. But in the truth, we are reconciled to God, and if we are living in a state of reconciliation (that is, doing those things in which He has declared His pleasure), then we are living in a state of peace. There may be—there is—much deprivation to be endured—many crosses to be carried—many present advantages to be sacrificed as the result of trying to live the lives of saints in the present evil world ; but, with all the drawbacks, we are happier in our activity, have more interest in existence, and can indulge in a more effective manner in the pleasure of anticipation, than those who know not God and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The world has all the chafe and fretfulness of an evil state without any of the alleviations that come with the gospel. Therefore, let us rightly estimate our position. Let us realize that even now we are greatly favoured in knowing God, or rather in being known of Him, while as regards the measureless futurity of the ages that are to come, it is difficult to express, and impossible to exaggerate, the glory of our standing as "fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God."

The Hope Of Israel

Hear the voice of God.—The voice of “Moses, the prophets, and the apostles.”—A fuller manifestation with the Lord’s coming.—A word by Isaiah concerning Israel.—The misfortunes of Israel.—All of God.—The present state of the Jews.—Not all we should desire.—Minds blinded.—God saw it would be so.—The past.—The future.—Precious promises; we individually interested.—We are Jews.—An orthodox believer’s rejoinder.—Half an idea.—Israelism blotted out altogether.—Abolish the earth by conflagration.—A short sighted objection.—The Scriptures regard Israel as one.—A discrimination as to individual desert.—Israel delivered from all not truly Israel.—The people “all righteous.”—A holy nation.—The house of David.—The brethren of the Lord Jesus.—The promise of pillarship.—Principal men.—The glorious mystical temple of the Deity.—Going no more out.—As stable as the sun in the heavens.—The new Jerusalem.—The battle and when.—The commonplace life of our probation.—A real piece of business.—Blows that hit something.—Keeping the body under—the whole body.—The devil’s whole host at bay.—Called to be saints.—How to overcome.—Reading the oracles of the living God.

How great is our privilege each time we thus assemble, to hear the voice of God in our midst in the reading of the Scriptures. It was a privilege esteemed even in the days of Christ when “Moses and the prophets were read in the synagogues every sabbath day”: a work in which he was in the habit of taking part (Acts 13:27; Luke 4:16). In our days the voice is larger: it is the voice of “Moses, the prophets, and the apostles”—a more comprehensive voice, a more abundant communication of the divine mind than Israel of the synagogues had. We may know more of God’s will and purpose than it was in their power to know. We are less privileged than they only in the single particular that we have no contemporary inspiration. Even this drawback will shortly disappear. We are about to witness a far fuller and more glorious manifestation of the Spirit than even the apostles beheld; for, with the Lord’s coming will come that pouring-out of the Spirit on the whole house of Israel promised from the beginning—yea, when God will pour out His Spirit upon all flesh, and the glory of the Lord will illumine the whole earth—not physical glory, not a visible shining, but glory in the sense of renown, reputation, praise. When all men recognize and serve and praise God (which they will not till Christ reigns), the earth will be filled with the glory of God as the waters cover the sea. We are looking for these times of refreshing. Meanwhile, it is ours to prize and use to the fullest our privilege of being able in these times of darkness and disobedience to hear the voice of God.

Today, we have first the word by Isaiah concerning Israel. The prophet’s words are good and comfortable words. They tell of kindness, and blessedness, and well-being to come. They are in-

roduced with a "but," which gives them greater point by contrast with something having gone before. That something we find in the end of the previous chapter. It is something put before us in the form of a question: "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers?" This question supposes it a matter of controversy as to what Israel's calamities were attributable—as to who brought them about. Such a controversy as a matter of fact exists. There are two ways of looking at the matter—the natural-man way and the divine way. The natural man, looking at the misfortunes of Israel, sees only the triumph of human prowess. The Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Romans had greater military skill than the Jews; therefore the Jews were overthrown. This is the "profane history" point of view—the view of all who look at occurrences as they appear to the eye of the observer who does not know God's relation to them. It was the view entertained by the enemies of Israel themselves. Thus the king of Assyria said, "By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent." The other view is presented by God Himself. He says of the Assyrian, he is "the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge . . . Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few . . . Wherefore it shall come to pass, that, when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks" (Isa. 10: 5-12). God, working behind, so to speak, strengthened, impelled, and guided the enemies of Israel in Israel's spoliation. The Assyrians, Babylonians, and Romans were merely instruments in God's hands, without their being aware of it. The work done by them was work done by Him. Hence, the right answer to the question, "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers?" is the answer immediately following the question: "Did not Jehovah, he against whom we have sinned? for they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient to his law. Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle: and it hath set him on fire round about, yet he knew not; and it burned him, yet he laid it not to heart."

This is the explanation of the present desolation of all things appertaining to Israel. It is a comfort to know that it is all of God, and that what Jesus said to Pilate concerning himself is true of the whole commonwealth of Israel in relation to the present Gentile ascendancy: "Thou couldst have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above." How cheering also to have God's recognition of the present state of the Jews. We look on them, and find them not at all what we should desire. They are barren of all intelligent recognition of their present position before God. They are full of a complacent wisdom which is a mixture of human philosophy and Rabbinical superstitions. We do not find the mind of the God of Israel, as exhibited in the prophets, reflected in them. What

Paul said still remains true : "Their minds are blinded unto this day." The spectacle would be discouraging if we relied on them in the least for our apprehensions of the ways of God in the earth. But we do not rely on them. There is no more consolation to be had from the Jews than from the Gentiles, though the Jews are more interesting than the Gentiles, because of their relation to the work of God in the earth. "Darkness covers *the earth* (the Gentiles), and gross darkness the people" (the Jews). It is part of this gross darkness that the Jews rejoice in their racial superiority, and explain their dispersion as God's way of diffusing light among the Gentiles, instead of confessing their scattered state as the punishment of their sins. In the midst of darkness it is comforting to read here in this portion of the word we have read, that God saw it would be so ; that although the fire of the divine anger should kindle on Israel and consume him, yet he should "know it not nor lay it to heart" (Isa. 42 : 25).

This is the past : a past of retribution : a time of giving to Jerusalem "double for all her sins" (Isa. 40 : 2) ; but the next chapter gives us the future—the future foreshown us in the gospel—the restoring again of the kingdom to Israel—the times of the restitution of all things : "But now thus said 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 . . . I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west ; I will say to the north, Give up ; and to the south, Keep not back ; bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth ; even everyone that is called by my name : for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him, yea, I have made him." In these great and precious promises we are individually interested. We are not sons of Israel by birth, but we have become so by adoption (Rom. 11 : 17 ; Eph. 2 : 19) ; and our standing in Israel is not less real or valid because we are of Gentile birth and extraction. On the contrary we are more really Jews than those Jews after the flesh who lack the faith of their father Abraham. It is a principle of New Testament doctrine that "they are not all Israel that are of Israel" (Rom. 9 : 6). Jesus did not recognize the Abrahamic relations of those Jews who rejected him, though he admitted their lineal extraction. He denied they were Abraham's children in the full and effectual sense, because they were destitute of the character of Abraham (John 8 : 37-44). Gentiles, though not born of Abraham's blood, are truly the children of Abraham, if having become adopted in Abraham's family, they are characterized by Abraham's faith and works (Rom. 4 : 11-12 ; Gal. 3 : 29). Consequently, we can rejoice in hope of these glorious promises, made in the prophets concerning the seed of Jacob. They belong to the Jews, and we are Jews ; for Paul expressly says, "He is a Jew who is one inwardly."

Here it is not difficult to imagine the orthodox believer exclaiming, "That is exactly my doctrine : spiritual Israel ! inward Jews ! Certainly ; I agree with you—that is the very truth, and consequently I reject the idea of carnal Jews being gathered and restored to their land." What must we say ? It is not difficult to answer.

The orthodox idea and the scriptural idea are not the same. The orthodox spiritual *Jew* is no Jew at all : the orthodox spiritual Israel is not Israel at all. Orthodox believers have run off with half an idea. They see the element of adoption ; they see the element of spirituality ; but they run away from the Jewism—from the Israelism. They recognize that Paul taught that believing Gentiles were adopted, but they reject the thing into which they were adopted ; they see a spiritual Israel, but they cannot see Israel for the word spiritual. By their notion, Israelism is blotted out altogether. They substitute immortal invisibility, natural to all men, surviving death, and departing to indefinable bliss among the stars, to a state in which the fortunes of the earth become a matter of supreme indifference. Nay, they abolish the earth by conflagration. They destroy all reason for Israelitiship. They do not know of the promises to Abraham. They deny the kingdom of God to be set up in the Holy Land over all the earth ; they are ignorant of the hope of Israel. It is very different with the inward Jew of Paul's teaching. Though inwardly, yet "*he is a Jew*"—a Jew in all points save his birth. He does not practise circumcision ; he does not observe days ; he is not under Moses, but this is no interference with his Jewship, for he is exempted from these things by the God of the Jews, under that new covenant which from the beginning He foreshadowed by His servants the prophets He would establish with the Jews, natural and adopted. He is a Jew in all his hopes and relations, and he now waits with strong desire for the fulfilment of the glorious promise to Israel, of which a portion has been read this morning.

It may be objected that these promises cannot apply to adopted Israelites, since they concern an Israel that has suffered judgment in Jehovah's anger—an Israel upon whom has been poured "the fury of His anger and the strength of battle," and who "knew not and laid it not to heart." It may be said that neither of these things can be affirmed of the brethren of Christ, and that therefore the promises cannot apply to them. This would be a short-sighted objection, though apparently well-founded. It would be short-sighted in leaving out of account that comprehensive view of Israel which in the Scriptures regards Israel as a whole and its history as one. As a whole, Israel has been scattered, peeled and punished, and as a whole Israel will be gathered, exalted and honoured, and to that Israel as a whole, all Jews, whether natural or adopted, belong ; but it does not follow that all individual Jews share either the one state or the other. Myriads of Jews have perished (*e.g.* in the wilderness for unbelief) who will have no share in the blessedness ; and a multitude will share in the restoration who have seen nothing of the afflictions of Israel in times past. In the bestowal of the covenanted mercies, there is a discrimination as to individual desert : but the general descriptions of Israel's lot, past or future, contemplate Israel as a whole ; and a genuine Israelite identifies himself with the national experience as a whole. Thus Daniel in "praying and making confession" at the end of the seventy years' captivity, uses the comprehensive pronoun "we." "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity,

SEASONS OF COMFORT

and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments : neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets ” (Dan. 9 : 5). “ We are become a reproach to our neighbours, a scorn and derision to those that are round about us . . . Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name : and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name’s sake. Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is their God ? Let him be known among the heathen in our sight, by the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed ” (Psa. 79 : 4, 9, 10). Though living in the nineteenth century, and inhabiting a Gentile land, as the brethren of Christ and the adopted seed of Abraham, we can pray these prayers more fervently and appropriately than his circumcised rejectors. On the same principle, we can lay claim to the glorious predictions of blessing, though they do refer to a nation which has been the subject of judgment and desolation. We belong to that nation, and own its history, as well as rejoice in its future.

This Israel, which as a whole is to be redeemed, will, when redeemed, be delivered from all that element, past or present, which though “ of Israel ” is not truly Israel. It will be composed of those only who show forth Jehovah’s praise. The people shall be “ all righteous ” (Isa. 60 : 21). The carnal element will be purged out and exterminated (Ezek. 20 : 38 ; Zeph. 3 : 11 ; Matt. 3 : 12). The purified remnant will be a holy nation (Zeph. 3 : 12, 13)—a great contrast to the Jewish nation at any former period in its history, comparable only with its state when it entered the land of promise under Joshua. We are specially interested in this holy nation—the nation as it will survive after the Lord’s purification of them. In this nation, as the brethren of the Lord Jesus, we shall have a special place. It is written that in that day the feeblest of Israel shall be as David, and “ the house of David as God, as the angel of the Lord before them ” (Zech. 12 : 8). As the body of Christ, the Son of David, the saints in that day will be the house of David, and to them will belong the special exaltation and glory and honour of the glorious day that will have dawned as “ a morning without clouds,” in accordance with the covenanted mercies of David, given to them (Isa. 55 : 3 ; 2 Sam. 23 : 4, 5).

The very kernel of the blessing appertaining to the hope of Israel is the position of the accepted brethren of the Lord Jesus. This is brought home to us in a special form in the messages to the seven churches, a portion of which has formed the other part of our reading. In those messages are many great and precious promises extended expressly to all who have ears to hear, and who overcome, whether they be dwellers in Asian cities or not. The one that occurs to me particularly in connection with the hope of Israel is the promise of pillarship : “ Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out : and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God ” (Rev. 3 : 12). This, of course, is the language of symbol ; but it is more expressive than a plain statement when the thing symbolized

is understood. We know what the temple of God is when used in a figurative sense. There is to be a literal temple, the temple shown to Ezekiel, we know ; but there is also to be a living temple, a temple composed of many people, a multitude in whom God will dwell, and through whom He will be manifested to the nations in the age to come. The temple of God in this sense is the community of the glorified saints. The promise to the victor is to become a pillar in this temple. We know what a pillar means used in this figurative way. James, Peter, and John were "pillars" in the apostolic community in the first century (Gal. 2 : 9). They were principal men, upholding men, men upon whom the fabric rested. It was a privilege to be a pillar in that arrangement of things ; but what shall it be to be a pillar in the glorious mystical temple of the Deity in the kingdom of God ? This is the promise : it is a great and precious promise ; it would be such if it meant only a fifty years' pillarship. Power and honour among men for fifty years, even in the present evil state of things, is considered a great prize, but the man that attains to pillarship in the divine arrangement of things, to be established on the ruins of the present system, "shall go *no more out*." A pillar in the mortal system breaks and is taken away : a mortal ruler dies ; but a ruler in the divine *aion* is immortal. His position is as stable as the sun in the heavens. When 500 years have rolled away, he will still be found in his place, as strong and joyful and as established as at the beginning. The name of God is written upon him : he is invested with the divine nature : he is immortal ; he cannot die any more : he is equal unto the angels. He also bears the name of the new Jerusalem, which at that time will have come down from God out of heaven. He is not an isolated unit. He is part of a system. He is a constituent of the Jerusalem government—the Jerusalem-governed polity—which will have come from God out of heaven, in having been created and established by Christ at his return from heaven. This will be the new Jerusalem as contrasted with the old—new indeed in all senses ; for in the old Jerusalem arrangement of things, there was nothing of immortality or stability. It was weak through the flesh, because in the hands of the flesh ; but the new Jerusalem is out of heaven and from God, and spiritual, immortal, and invincible in all its characteristics. What an unspeakable honour to be an element of such a *kosmos*. It is considered a great thing now to be in any of Her Majesty's "services"—to exercise authority under the royal arms. This is to have Victoria's name written upon a man, and the name of London, and to be a pillar in the Constitutional Temple. But it is a poor affair compared with the commonwealth of Israel. There is none of the stability, permanence, strength, life, efficiency, glory, and gladness that belong to the household of God in the age to come.

In view of these things, it is but the commonest wisdom to ponder the fact that this glorious status is promised with reservations. It is to be bestowed on "*him that overcometh*." This intimates to us that

" There is a battle to be fought,
A victory to be won."

Where is the battle and when? Can there be any doubt about this? Let us open our eyes and see. The battle is now—in the commonplace life of our probation. There is a danger of forgetting this. There is a danger of acting on the common notion that the business now on hand is to get as much enjoyment as ever we can. The battle we have to fight is the battle Paul fought in his day. At the end of his life, looking back he said he had fought it—“ I have fought a good fight !” While the battle was on, he tells us how he conducted it. “ So fight I, *not as one that beateth the air.*” One that beats the air is a man who goes through the performance of fighting but hits nothing ; it is not a real fight, but a sham fight. The man attitudinizes beautifully but nothing is done. The fight we have to fight is a real piece of business. We deal blows that hit something, and take the life out of the thing hit. Paul indicates the point in his continuing words, “ I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection.” It is ourselves we have to fight. We incline in certain directions pleasing to the flesh ; and we have to stand in our own way, and push ourselves back and say, “ No, you must not go in those paths which are forbidden to the sons of God.” The body we keep under is the whole body, not any one part. The lust of the eye is as much a lust of the body as the lust that leads to fornication ; the lust of the flesh in all its affections, is as much a lust of the body as that which leads to uncleanness. The pride of life is as much an attribute of the body—of the brain part of the body, as that which is more gross and vile in the estimation of men. The whole category is outside of saintship. A man may keep himself clean in certain directions and be defiled. He may be free from adultery, but a slave to the praise of men and the outside appearances of things. He may be innocent of drunkenness, but given to pride and covetousness. He may be perfectly respectable, according to human ethics, and abominable according to the rule of divine estimation. We must not forget, “ Guilty in one point, guilty of all,” is a rule of divine judgment. We must keep the devil’s whole host at bay. Of what advantage will it be to keep off ninety-nine Zulus if the hundredth strikes his assegai into our heart ?

We must fight a real fight. Do not let us pose merely. Do not let us go through the attitudes and beat the air. Do not let us profess the name and attend the meetings, and all the while in private life “ walk as other Gentiles walk.” We are called to be saints, or holy ones, or those who do the will of God—and not those who merely say, Lord, Lord. To be such involves self-denial, cross-taking-up, and cross-carrying. It involves the doing of “ things,” and all the things “ that he says,” and these relate to the common ways of private life. In this we have to fight ourselves often, for the spirit lusts against the flesh, and the flesh against the spirit. This is the battle in which we have to overcome, upon which so much depends.

How are we to overcome? John answers : “ This is the victory that overcometh the world, *even our faith.*” What is “ our faith ”? Paul answers : “ Faith is the substance of *things hoped for.*” It is a question of confidence in things to come. Whence comes this confidence? Paul tells us : “ Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by

the word of God." It comes to what Paul said to the Ephesian elders in his farewell address : " I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." The advice remains good to this day. The diligent, sympathetic daily reading and studying of the oracles of the living God, with prayer to Him who slumbers not nor sleeps, will fortify a man for successful conflict with all the enemies he has to encounter on the road to eternal life ; while the neglect of them will certainly ensure his failure, however gifted he may be as a natural man, or however successful in the objects of life which the common run of men set before their eyes. "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away : but the word of the Lord endureth for ever."

God And The Bible

Divine wisdom.—Perfect wisdom.—Measureless power.—Self-evolution an absurdity.—An initiating power a mathematical necessity.—The question settled.—Settled for ever by the existence of the Bible.—Distinct from all books.—A record of what God has done.—Eternal power alone is intrinsically great.—Glorious kernel and invisible extension.—The dreadful Majesty of heaven and earth.—Contracted and withering notions of the natural man.—Glorious and comforting character of God.—We turn our thoughts towards Him.—Our Father, compassionate of our weakness.—Wealth of comfort.—Our weakness.—The Rock that is higher.—The guilty.—The sense attaching to the word.—Presumptuous sin.—Those who are not presumptuous.—Forgiveness.—The Mosaic service.—Confession and sacrifice.—The first features of the gospel.—Washed, justified and sanctified.—Continuance in sin excluded.—What forgiven men should be.—Speaking evil of no man.—Magnanimous.

" O LORD, how manifold are thy works ! in wisdom hast thou made them all : the earth is full of thy riches." So exclaimed David by the Spirit, and so must every man feel who is enlightened to apprehend and love the God of David. On every hand we are confronted with the manifest products of divine wisdom. Our own bodies, in every part and fibre and movement ; the million vegetable structures, from the tiniest fungus to the oak of the forest ; the teeming world of animate life in land and ocean ; the glorious arch of heaven with its azure depths, and the stupendous and shining machinery of the starry host—let the mind reflect on them, and there is but one deliverance at all adequate, and that is the exclamation of David. In wisdom—perfect wisdom and measureless power, they have all been, and are continually sustained.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

We listen with impatience to the man who thinks he can deliver us from all sense of mystery in the case by some or any theory of self-evolution. We tell him the facts are against him, because self-evolution implies a beginning point at which evolution had not taken place ; and it is a mathematical necessity that there must at that point have existed a power capable of initiating the evolution, else there is no explanation why the evolution did not take place countless ages before it began. And when he asks us, " But who made God ? " we answer, As something must never have been made, we must on any theory accept an inscrutable fact ; and it is more according to reason to accept an inscrutability that was equal to the evolution than an inscrutability which—having no wisdom or power of initiative—could not be equal to it.

And while we are discussing with him—unfortunately the need for discussing it is forced upon us every day—we turn to the Bible and say, " Man, while you and I are discussing matters alike beyond the grasp and settlement of human intellect on one side or other of the question, the question is settled for us by the book. This book cannot be got rid of. It is not a question of discrepancies or questionable authenticities—which by the way do not exist in the case, but are only alleged by the unscrupulous malice which in its turn deceives honesty in many cases. It is a question of the whole character of a book which is a library, extending over thirty centuries in its composition. Study this character : read this book : read it daily and diligently, as the transcendent importance of the subject demands, and you will find that it is its own evidence. It cannot be accounted for on any theory of human composition. It defies explication in all its narratives and all its prophecies, on such a principle. It is intelligible only on one principle ; it will answer to no other ; it is a book of divine inception—it is a book of divine narrative—it is a record of divine doings, divine sayings, divine prophecies, divine purposes. Every one who reads it with discrimination—who brings to it any knowledge of human nature and human books, and any capability of discerning between things that differ—realizes in the mere reading of it, apart from all extraneous questions, subjects and investigations whatever, that the question of the Creator is settled for ever by the existence of the Bible and the Bible alone."

The Bible is distinct from all books and systems in this, that its main aim is to make man acquainted with God. It is not a book of philosophy ; it is not a book of morals ; it is not a book of poetry ; it is a stately, majestic, pure record of what God has done among men, with the object He has plainly declared throughout—the object of making Himself known, and of bringing men into adoration and subjection. It makes nothing of man : it makes everything of God. This is according to reason ; for man is but a transient form of eternal power ; eternal power alone is intrinsically great and worthy. And of this eternal power, it tells us what we could not know, but what is also according to true reason. It tells us this eternal power is a unit filling heaven and earth with a simultaneous presence, as a light fills a room, yet having a located radiant focus

as light in a gas-lit room has focus and source in the gas-jet that illumines it. It tells us that this universal power with glorious kernel and invisible extension is the Father, filling immensity by the plenitude of His inextinguishable and undiminishable presence—the One person in whom and of whom are all things—the seat and source of the wisdom which has contrived all things—the Creator, possessor and dreadful Majesty of heaven and earth, before whom the highest angels bow in awful reverence.

Having told us this much—and oh, how much this is when we contrast it with the contracted and withering notions of the natural man, whose speculations are little better than the gibberings of an idiot—it proceeds to tell us most glorious and comforting facts concerning His character. Moses heard the proclamation of His name, and that proclamation has been written for our learning:—“Yahweh, Yahweh Elohim, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.” There are several things in this proclamation that strike and challenge attention. The first is very manifest: “merciful, gracious, long-suffering.” The meaning of this is practically exemplified in the history of Israel, who though now scattered because of their sins, were borne with for many generations before God’s anger reached a point at which He would no longer spare. The Psalmist gives concise and beautiful expression to it: “He, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath. For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again” (78: 38). There is much in this for our personal consolation. We have been brought into relation with the God of Israel, in our subjection to the gospel of His Son. We have become His sons and daughters if our faith is one that is alive, working by love, in the obedience of His commandments. In this position how naturally—naturally to the spiritual man—we turn our thoughts towards “Him with whom we have to do.” If we could not find comfort in our contemplations of Him, how comfortless we should be. We are poor and weak ourselves in all senses. We have no mental resources of any account. In the flesh dwelleth no good thing. We delight in the law of God after the inner man: but we find a distressing impotence in the direction of spiritual accomplishment, which would bow us to earth with despair were it not for the encouragement we draw from “the God of all comfort” in our contemplations of Him as revealed. He is presented to us as our Father, compassionate of our weakness, and appreciative of our dependence. Jesus made this aspect of Him very prominent in his communications with the disciples. “My Father and your Father”; “The Father himself loveth you”; “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him”; “Ye are of more value than many sparrows”; “The Father who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly”. We do well to avail ourselves of the full wealth of comfort there is in these

SEASONS OF COMFORT

words. Our weakness and our cloud are all our own. They are incidental to the weak nature we have. They no more interfere with His kindness than the mountain mist interferes with the brightness of the sun. Our weakness may incapacitate us for rejoicing in the Lord at all times ; but the Lord is there all the same, to rejoice in. In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength, and in the mental sense, we can always draw upon Him for sustenance. We can always lean on the Rock that is higher than all. We learn at last to say with the Psalmist : " Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth : but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."

The second point, though involving an apparent contradiction, contains also much comfort and some wholesome instruction for the unthinking—"forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." The apparent contradiction may be manifested thus : if God by no means clears the guilty, how can He be said to forgive any, seeing it is only the guilty that need forgiveness ? The answer is to be found in the sense attaching to the word "guilty" as used in this connection. It is not in the sense of having committed an offence merely, but in the sense of having done it with guile and without that acceptable repentance towards God, which is the basis of forgiveness and which secured the pardon of David in the most heinous of offences. Achan may be taken as a type of the guilty that will not be cleared. He deliberately disobeyed a divine injunction through avarice, and made no confession of his sin till found out. Then he admitted the offence that was known and read of all men, but being emphatically "guilty," he was not cleared. So Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and the man who blasphemed, and the son of the Egyptian woman who presumptuously broke the Sabbath law, were all specimens of the "guilty" whom God will by no means "clear," either under Moses or Christ. There is no provision for the remission of presumptuous sin. Even under the law, no sacrifice was to be accepted for such.

But for those who are not presumptuous, but who on the contrary are broken and contrite in heart, and tremble at Jehovah's word, there is forgiveness. The Mosaic service was one long and perpetually recurring illustration of God's desire to be approached in reconciliation of transgressors. For all classes of offence (except offences of presumption), forgiveness was stipulated on confession and sacrifice. The offering accepted at the hands of Abel is proof that this dispensation of the goodness of God has been in force from the beginning. Its latest illustration exists in the fact stated by Paul, concerning the appearing of Christ in the flesh, that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them," to which he adds that "God had committed to the apostles the word of reconciliation." "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." This is one of the first features of the gospel as apostolically delivered : "Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins." It was the first thing proclaimed

by Peter in connection with the gospel on the day of Pentecost. "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins."

We have therefore to realize this, as we assemble round the symbols of the Lord's death, that from all our past sins we have been washed, justified and sanctified. We stand before God accepted in Christ, notwithstanding the grievous record of the days of our darkness. In this let us rejoice; let us give thanks to God, who of His own abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a lively hope. While we do so, however, let us remember what belongs to our position as saints, who have been washed from their past sins. "Shall we continue in sin that grace (or the favour of God's forgiveness) may abound? God forbid. How shall we that are dead to sin continue any longer therein?" (Rom. 6 : 1). Some have thought in past times, and many practically seem to think so now, that a continuance of transgression is permissible to the children of God, as calling for and securing a continuance of the favour of forgiveness. As to this, John is very pointed: "Let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil" (1 John 3 : 7). So also Paul: "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them." This is on the negative side of the question. As to what forgiven men—the saints of God—the brethren of our Lord Jesus should be, Paul makes it very plain: "Put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness . . . Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers . . . Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4 : 22-32).

Finally, it is no part of the spirit of our calling to glory over other men because of the privileged position in which the Gospel has placed us. Paul expressly exhorts us "to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men," adding this as a reason, "for we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another." A recollection of our own antecedents will, in the true exercise of reason, help us to be magnanimous towards those who are still where we were. It will help us in the same direction if we remember that our whole present probation is intended as a preparation for the mighty work of conferring blessedness on the family of man throughout the utmost bounds of the earth.

Baruch And God's Message

Baruch.—A sorrowing man.—The prophets an example of suffering affliction.—The cause of Baruch's depression.—The companion of Jeremiah.—We may often feel such.—“Denying ungodliness” not an exhilarating performance.—A message to Baruch.—A mighty honour.—A message to every man.—Only wait.—The end not far off.—Baruch's experience.—The subject of his sorrows.—A ground of consolation to all.—The eyes of the Lord open to the righteous.—We are in the hands of God.—The darkest hour.—David's tears.—A joyful victor at the last.—God's advice to Baruch.—Why recorded.—For every son of God.—“Mind not high things.”—Practical counsels.—The deluge of calamity about to break.—The age in which we live.—Content with poor and lowly form of life.—The new order of things.

BARUCH is before us as the theme of our contemplation this morning—the companion of Jeremiah the prophet, and his helper in writing down the messages of the Spirit (Jer. 45). There are various interesting features in his case which will make it profitable for us to consider him. First, he is before us as a sorrowing man. He is represented as saying, “Woe is me now! for the LORD hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing, and I find no rest.” Here is something to note: it may strike us as strange at first. It is natural to assume that the prophets of the Lord, and all who had to do with them in the way of actual service, were men to whom inspiration and the exercise of authority secured the enjoyment of their position; and placed them beyond the weariness and painful endurance which we find incident to the position of a saint in these days of Gentile ascendancy. A consideration of this case will dispel all feelings of this sort, and enable us to see the point of James' advice to “take the prophets for an example of suffering affliction and of patience.” They were fellow-sufferers with us.

When we ask the cause of Baruch's depression of mind, the facts supply a ready answer. As the companion of Jeremiah, he shared the odium that belonged to the position of Jeremiah. Jeremiah was pretty much alone in Jerusalem. The princes, the elders, and the priests—corresponding to the clergy and the upper classes of our day—were all against him; and under their leadership, the common people held him in contempt. His own testimony is, “I was a derision to all my people, and their song all the day” (Lam. 3:14). His own feelings in contact with them and his estimate of them are manifest from Jer. 9:2, 3: “Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men, that I might leave my people, and go from them! for they be all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men. And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me, saith the Lord.” Between the derision manifested by the people towards

Jeremiah and Jeremiah's sense of their worthlessness, it is easy to understand his statement that "for peace he had great bitterness." The asperity of his position was so sharp that he felt inclined to shut his mouth. He said, "I will speak no more in his name," for the reason given: "Because the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily." He even went so far as to curse the day of his birth, saying, "Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. . . . Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?" (20 : 14, 18). This helps us to realize what James testifies of Elijah and the prophets in general, as true, that they were men, "subject to like passions as we are."

As companion of a man of this experience, Baruch shared in the dreariness of the situation as expressed in his words, "I fainted in my sighing, I find no rest." Are we not often distressed with a similar experience arising from a similar cause? By the truth we have become companions of the Despised and Rejected of men, who said, "It is sufficient for the disciple that he be as his Master." Companions of his companions, we may often feel cast down like Paul, but not destroyed: fainthearted and unrestful like Baruch. "Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts" is not exhilarating. We may often feel dreary in the performance. Let us not be too much dejected. The present world is an evil world under any circumstances. Evil is ingrained in the constitution of things. "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." People in effect imagine we can escape it by one contrivance or another. They constantly tug at their chains. It is a vain struggle. We are in the grasp of sin's bondage and we cannot be free except in the way provided in Christ. It is better to quietly and finally accept our fate with resignation, and lay hold of the blessed hope God has given us in the gospel. It is a help in the doing of this to remember that the prophets and their companions have been sighing, sorrowing men who have had to fortify themselves by the consolation of the truth.

God sent a message to Baruch by Jeremiah. What a great honour that the God of Israel, the Almighty Creator of all things, should send a message to a mortal man to comfort him! It may be said that here, at all events, the case of Baruch differs from ours. For a time no doubt it does; but it is only a question of time. There is a time for everything. Our times and circumstances do not admit of individual messages as appropriate just at present, but there is a message waiting for us all. Christ comes with a message to every man who will appear before him. It will be individual to each man at the judgment seat. This may appear afar off and not analogous to the message sent to Baruch. It will not seem either when the time arrives. It will be near and pointed and practical and appropriate. It will be a message of comfort to the sorrowing and faithful. "He will satiate the weary soul, and replenish the sorrowful soul" (Jer. 31 : 25). He will "comfort all that mourn." He will give unto them "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness." For this joyful consummation,

if we are among Zion's mourners, we have only to wait. It is difficult to wait, perhaps, but this waiting is the only attitude full of promise. "They shall not be ashamed that wait for me." "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him . . . we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation." Therefore, as Paul exhorts, "Cast not away your confidence . . . which hath great recompense of reward. For he that shall come will not (always) tarry." The longest time possible to man is short. Every man's life is shut up at the end, not far off, like a road with a wall built across. We have only to wait till then, for the end of life is the arrival of resurrection to every man's consciousness. Thus, not a long way off, our message waits. God give us a good message.

What was the message to Baruch about? It was about Baruch's sorrows. "Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, unto thee, O Baruch: Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow." Several things suggest themselves here. A man's sorrow is not a blithesome subject of discourse to other people; but it is otherwise to himself. It may not be exactly an elating subject, but it is comforting. What more consoling to a man groaning under some distress, than for a powerful sympathetic friend to sit down with him, so to speak, and enquire into his trouble, and give him promises and assurances of a solacing character? This was Baruch's experience in this case, and its interest to us lies in the fact that we have to deal with the same God who condescended to send to Baruch a message on the subject of his sorrows. We are not allowed to hear from Him as yet; but all things are known to Him, and He is not unheeding of the troubles of those whose hearts are toward Him. Nay, He may even contrive their trouble for them. "Happy is the man whom God correcteth" (Job 5:17). It is an arduous experience and difficult to endure; but the upshot will be unmixedly beneficial. Therefore it is written, "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: for whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth" (Prov. 3:11). In the midst of the trouble, He giveth consolation, causing light to arise to the upright in the darkness (Psa. 112:4). "He makes a way of escape" (1 Cor. 10:13). He comforteth those of His who are cast down (2 Cor. 7:6). He establishes, strengthens, settles, after they have suffered awhile (1 Pet. 5:10). These things are all testified, and constitute a ground of consolation to all, even in this deserted century, who place their hope in God and keep His commandments.

Baruch's case is evidence that the eyes of the Lord are open to the righteous and His ear open to their cry. This truth is illustrated in many ways in the Scriptures. Nothing is more powerful in this way than the statement of David, by the Spirit, concerning himself and his Son: "Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?" Therefore, in the midst of all our troubles, let us not be utterly cast down. Let us have it as a mental reserve to draw upon, the recollection that we are in the hands of God who will not suffer the billows to go over our

head to our destruction, but will come to our release when we have suffered sufficiently. In the darkest hour we may always rally ourselves like David. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (Psa. 42: 11). David indulged in this gleaming comfort at a time when he was saying, "O my God, my soul is cast down within me. . . . My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul within me." We can never be in a lower deep than these words represent. David came through it all, a joyful victor at the last, ready for the place that awaits him in the triumphant throng that will surround the Lord in the day of His glory; and shall we lie down in despair? Nay, nay, let the outward man perish: the inward man is renewed day by day, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

What was the pith of God's message to Baruch? It was a piece of advice which carries with it certain instructive conclusions. "Seekest thou great things for thyself? *seek them not.*" Baruch had evidently been turning his eyes in the direction of great things. It was not much of a wonder. He had become weary of the continual self-denial involved in his companionship with a derided prophet of the Lord. He saw everybody around him looking after themselves, "seeking their own," as in Paul's day (Phil. 2: 21). "From the least of them even to the greatest of them everyone was given to covetousness" (Jer. 6: 13). From which it follows as a reasonable conclusion that most of them were partly successful and well-to-do. Baruch had evidently begun to think that he might as well try among the rest, or, at all events, make some effort to place himself beyond the reach of evil. God's advice in the case is before us: "Seekest thou great things for thyself? *seek them not.*" Why was this advice recorded? Not for Baruch's exclusive benefit. It is doubtless true here what Paul says of another case: "Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him; but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed if we believe." The advice to Baruch is advice to every son of God. "Seek them not." It is advice conveyed in many forms: "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate." "Labour not to be rich." "Having food and raiment, let us therewith be content." These are some of the forms in which the same exhortation is delivered directly to ourselves. They are meant as practical counsels. We may disregard them now, and join the world in its race for distinction and wealth; in that case the day will come when we shall discover that our eyes and ears have been strangely sealed to the monitions of wisdom.

The reason connected with the counsel given to Baruch was personal to himself, but is nevertheless not lacking of application to us. God said, "For, behold, I will bring evil upon all flesh." This doubtless referred to the deluge of calamity that

was about to break upon the whole country of Judah, by the hand of the Babylonian army, and sweep everything before it, as intimated in verse 4: "The Lord saith thus, Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land." The applicability of such a reason to us lies in the fact that a similar fiat has gone forth concerning the kingdoms of the Gentiles, in the age in which we live. A time of trouble such as has never yet visited them, is about to come; and the present order of things is to be broken up, in anger and great judgment, and the kingdom of God to be established over all. The advice not to seek great things in the present *aion* is therefore of equal cogency to what it had in Baruch's case. In a sense, it may have very little application to us, because none of us have it in our power to aspire after great things. Still, if it cannot apply in this way, it may operate negatively in helping us to be content with that poor and lowly form of life in which it has, in all ages, pleased God to seek the heirs of the coming kingdom and glory; and to wait with composure the storm that will sweep away the kingdoms of men, and clear the way for that order of things in which righteousness, godliness, wealth, security, and peace, will gladden the earth for evermore.

Four Prominent Personages

Four personages important in their day.—Nebuchadnezzar.—Pharaoh.—The king of Judah.—Mouldered into nameless dust.—The fourth a prophet of the Lord.—All gone.—The futurity written for them.—The lesson.—The tenantless shadows of a perished past.—Life but a vapour.—Another view.—Ages to come.—Glory and light.—Despair not written on the face of the universe.—Hope the language of heaven and earth.—Our present days upon earth a shadow, yet of immense consequence in determining the future.—Ezekiel in suffering and in exaltation.—The rejected and the accepted.—Workers of iniquity.—Followers of God.—The national liturgy.—The publican of the parable.—No longer a sinner laden with his sins.—A very different person from the incorrigible sinner of the Prayer-book.—The apostolic antidote.—A possible deception.—Difference between righteousness and sin.—Without hope.—The true sayings of God.—All them that obey him.—Obedience in many points hard and bitter.—The day of our trial.—The advice that Christ gives.—God will help.—Working out for us an eternal weight of joy.

OUR reading this morning (Ezek. 17) brings before us four personages prominent and important in their day, from whom we may learn something of valuable application to ourselves. In the first place, they have long ceased out of the land of the living. This may seem too

FOUR PROMINENT PERSONAGES

common a circumstance to be commented upon. Perhaps so, but it is a great fact, nevertheless, of immense assistance to those in the land of the living who may be wise enough to realize it. For, were not these men very real in their day? Was not Nebuchadnezzar a mighty ruler, as picturesquely and impressively surrounded with the accessories of authority as the Emperor of Germany or Queen Victoria? Did he not enjoy the sweets of gratified ambition and the satisfaction of unchallenged supremacy with all the zest of any modern incumbent of imperialism? Lived he not an active, intelligent, consequential life in the field and in the metropolis? Did he not command homage and deference as royalty now does? Was his name not a power in the land of the living? Yes, Nebuchadnezzar was just as human and practical, and to himself real and precious, as any living soul now enjoying the breath of life. And Pharaoh, was he a whit behind him? Was he not Nebuchadnezzar's compeer and rival, as fervently interested in all human things as any man alive? The king of Judah, also, was a man, and an interested, anxious, scheming man, like all the other wearers of crowns. And where are they and all their surroundings, so important in their day? Mouldered into nameless dust. They are gone as completely as if they had never been. They were probably interred with pomp. The coffins containing their remains or the urns their dust, were doubtless of the most precious material, and placed in the securest and most lasting place of sepulture to be found: but where now the kingly sarcophagus, the lordly mausoleum? The very trace of them has vanished as completely as the footprint in the sand washed out by the advancing tide.

The fourth was a prophet of the Lord, of whose end we have no record. He may have died in peace and come to his grave with honour: but it is more likely, a great deal, that he shared the fate of the company to which he belonged, of whom it is testified that "they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy :) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth." Whether or no, they are all gone. We look back to the moment when the words were written which we have read in their English translation this morning. At that moment, these four men were living characters on the stage of action; now, they are not, except in the futurity written for them in the book of God by the parts they severally performed.

The lesson of this part of the case is obvious. We are assembled this morning in the apparent realities of present conscious and intelligent life; and it seems to our senses as if the scene would never change, as if the life we have would never vanish, as if we must remain for ever. The contemplation of the past will help to correct this hallucination of the senses. We shall realize, as we grope in the tenantless shadows of a perished past that was as real in its day as the imperious present, that we too are flitting across the scene; that upon us also the light of life will go out, and our names disappear in

SEASONS OF COMFORT

the same awful vortex of time that has already drawn into its bosom of everlasting oblivion, countless myriads of names and renowns and greatnesses.

The realization of this fact—that our life is but as a vapour that appeareth for a little while and then vanisheth away—would be altogether a depressing fact if there were no other view to be taken. If we could only look back upon a dark devouring past—if we could not also look forward unto those “ages to come” of which the Spirit of God speaks by Paul, in which God will “show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus”—ages of glory and light and joy and life everlasting, there would be no wisdom or advantage in reflecting on our situation. Rather would it be expedient to stifle thought and give strong drink to him that is ready to perish: “Let him drink, and forget his misery.” But the case stands not thus. Despair is not written on the face of the universe. Hope is the language of heaven and earth as we see them, even if we were unable in the absence of the Father’s voice to interpret their speech. “Good hope through grace,” is the proclamation of the gospel. Eternal wisdom which brings this good tidings asks us to number and see the present days of our vanity that we may rightly estimate and redeem them, and not waste and ruin them by walking as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their minds, having the understanding darkened. In this relation it is wise and wholesome to remember, as we contemplate the generations of the dead, that our days upon earth are as a shadow; that there is none abiding; that every man walketh in a vain show, and that every man at his best estate is altogether vanity.

It is well also to recollect that though in themselves of very little value, our mortal days are of immense consequence as determining the cast of the future. Ezekiel, who, buried with whatever dishonour, will stand in glorious acceptance among the chosen of the Lord in the day of Christ’s manifestation upon earth, will occupy that position as the result of the mortal history enacted 2,400 years ago. But for Ezekiel in suffering there would be no Ezekiel in exaltation. Our present life is of unspeakable importance viewed in this light. The idea is brought home to us in the other part of our reading, where Jesus tells us that in the day of the kingdom, many will come “from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God.” These “many” coming there from all points of the compass, are comprehensive of the selection from among “all nations,” which it was divinely purposed to effect by the testimony apostolically delivered to them (Luke 24:47; Acts 15:14). They therefore comprehend any in Birmingham and elsewhere who may become fitted by the word of truth to be numbered among them. At the joyful time of their muster, there are others to whom a different portion is assigned; whom the Lord refuses to acknowledge, and who depart from his presence “in weeping and gnashing of teeth when they see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and they themselves thrust out.” Now, on what principle is it, that some are

rejected while others are accepted? This is most important to realize, for it is the apprehension and effectuation of this principle now that lays the foundation for the "exceeding joy" that waits on the presence of our Lord Jesus at his coming. The principle is stated with a plainness and simplicity that come down to the understanding of the least capable. Jesus tells us that in that day he will say to the rejected, "I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye *workers of iniquity*." Hence the ground of rejection is the pursuance of a certain line of action in the present time, while we are, so to speak, left to ourselves. A certain line of action the Lord considers iniquitous; of a certain other line of action he will say, "Well done." How important to know the one and the other. There is forgiveness with God, but it is for those who "confess their sins and forsake them" (Prov. 28 : 13); who "repent" in this scriptural sense (Mark 6 : 12), who let the time past of their lives suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles (1 Pet. 4 : 3), and who now seek to be followers of God as dear children, walking in love (Eph. 5:1-2), and who thus doing His commandments, acquire a right to eat of the tree of life, and to enter through the gates into the city (Rev. 22 : 14). There is a poor prospect for those who cannot truthfully say more than the national liturgy makes the national sinners dolefully mumble every Sunday: "We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done." The people seem to think that a confession of this sort is the very pinnacle of piety. They justify it by reference to the publican of the parable who, standing afar off, looking toward the temple, besought mercy to himself as a sinner, and of whom Christ declared that he went down to his house justified rather than the complacent Pharisee who was able to recount his righteous deeds. But this is a misapplication of truth. It is quite true that the ground of the justification or forgiveness of a sinner to whom the gospel comes is the confession of his unworthy history, and the hearty recognition of the entire absence of any ground of recommendation to God; but the case is altered when in the waters of baptism, he becomes washed and sanctified and cleansed from all his past sins. He is no longer a sinner laden with his sins: he is a saint or consecrated one, who having become dead to sin, in his baptismal participation in the death of Christ, no longer continues therein. He no longer yields his members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but unto God, as a man alive from the dead, and his members as instruments of righteousness (Rom. 6 : 13). He no longer lives the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men but to the will of God (1 Pet. 4 : 2). He belongs to those who are sober, and hoping to the end for the salvation coming with Christ, as obedient children, not fashioning themselves according to the former lusts in their ignorance, but being holy in all manner of conversation, after the image of Him who hath called them (1 : 13-15). He is not without fault, but for this there is provision in the priesthood of Christ, who makes intercession for the saints, and obtains forgiveness for those who walk in the light (1 John 1 : 7 ; 2 : 1). A saint with forgiven faults and failings is a very different person from the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

incorrigible sinner of the Prayer-book. Although he is commanded to say with his brethren, "We are unprofitable servants : we have done that which it was our duty to do," still this speech is to come out of their mouth after he has "done all those things that are commanded" (Luke 17 : 10). Orthodox religion has enshrouded this feature in mist. It is most important to be emancipated from the misconception. The apostolic antidote is contained in the words, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet. 4 : 18). And again in such words as these : "Be not deceived : he that doeth righteousness is righteous" (1 John 3 : 7). "Let no man deceive you with vain words ; for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them" (Eph. 5 : 6). These words point in the direction of a possible deception on the subject. It is a deception widely and perhaps unconsciously practised in the present day. The difference between righteousness and sin is either practically abolished by the vain thoughts and theories of men, or the necessity for righteousness is destroyed by false theologies which practically teach that salvation is independent of personal reformation, and more likely to be secured by remorseful guilt than a purified conscience. The truth is that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Heb. 11 : 6), and it is another truth that Jesus is "the author of eternal salvation to *them that obey him*" (Heb. 5 : 9). Consequently, those who are destitute of faith and obedience are without hope. Disobedience resulting from unbelief was the beginning of mischief with the Adamic race. Obedience resulting from faith is the road back to blessing opened through Christ. These declarations cannot be controverted however unpalatable they may be. They are the true sayings of God, as will be discovered in joy and anguish by different classes when the Lord stands in the earth to make visible the issues of the present probation.

If the salvation coming with Christ is for "all them that obey him," it follows that he must have given them commandments to obey. It is so. In the last words of Christ to his apostles before his ascension, he said to them concerning the nations to whom their testimony was to be delivered, "Teach them to observe *all things whatsoever I have commanded you*" (Matt. 28 : 20). He emphatically predicates friendship on compliance with this, saying, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (John 15 : 14). John the beloved disciple speaks thus strongly on the point : "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2 : 4). Here, then, is a rule by which we may try ourselves and judge ourselves ; and by which also we may correctly estimate the pretensions of the great religious bodies of the world. They are loud, some of them, in their professions of his name ; but where is the obedience ? His institutions and precepts are disregarded, and the traditions of men, both in faith and practice, exalted to their place, as it was in Israel in the days of Jesus. Concerning ourselves, the rule is most important to apply ; because obedience in many points is hard and bitter. Now is the day of our trial. When

FOUR PROMINENT PERSONAGES

Christ arrives, the necessity for the commandments we now have will have passed for ever.

The advice most natural in the circumstances is the advice that Christ gives in connection with the very words that have engaged our thoughts : " Strive to enter in at the strait gate : for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able." The original word is " agonize " —agonize to enter. This is stronger than strive. It expresses the highest degree of earnest endeavour. It is very different from Dr. Talmage's advice in a recent lecture, not to be in too great a hurry on the road to heaven for fear the boilers should burst. Dr. Talmage's doctrine is more agreeable to the natural man than Christ's : but Christ's is the true doctrine for all that : to seek FIRST the kingdom of God and His righteousness. After all the other things, he says, the Gentiles seek. The brethren of Christ are not independent of the " things " the Gentiles seek ; but their heavenly Father knows they have need of them, and will give them in needed measure. These are not the supreme object of their solicitude and endeavour, as it is with the Gentiles. The principles and the hope of their calling—worthless rubbish in the eyes of the unbelieving or the worldly—are with them of primary consequence, and will give shape and bent to their individual policy in all the paths of their meanwhile wandering feet.

God will help those whose affections are thus set on things above and not on things on the earth. That is, He will help them in attaining the object of their endeavour, as children of God. He may not help them in the sense of prospering them in this present world : this might be help in the direction of destruction, though pleasant for the time being. He will help them in the sense of so manipulating the circumstances of their lives, that they will be guided and kept in the way that leads to life. This guidance may mean the actual permission of evil—nay the contrivance of affliction. This is taught in a variety of ways. The Psalmist teaches it in saying, " It is good for me that I have been afflicted. . . . Before I was afflicted I went astray : but now I have kept thy word." It is taught still more plainly in the words quoted by Paul : " Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, neither be weary of his correction : for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." The lesson is taught in the parable of the fig tree, read this morning. " Dung it and dress it, that it may bring forth fruit " cannot mean anything else than that process of individual exercising in the ways of providence referred to by Jesus when he says : " Every branch in me that bringeth not forth good fruit, he taketh away : and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it that it may bring forth more fruit." Let us take this consolation in all the dark and bitter hours of our present probation, that if we are intelligently exercised thereby, they are working out for us an eternal weight of joy unspeakable and full of glory.

The Hope And Its Strong Foundations

The absent friend.—The reviving of our memories.—Strengthening faith.—Breaking bread in remembrance of him.—Words pronounced almost every time we perform the act.—“I have received of the Lord.”—Who speaks thus?—Paul.—The simple process by which the fact is demonstrated.—Morally equivalent to having Paul personally in our midst.—Did Paul speak truly?—The enemy dare not impute untruth.—The whole life of Paul a life of self-sacrifice and drawback.—Only one other view.—The last entrenchment of deceit.—The facts.—Impossibility of hallucination.—A public occurrence.—The light of day.—A mere perverse resistance of truth.—Paul’s case invincible.—Faith needs no stronger foundation, but has got it.—Earlier witnesses.—The disciples gave witness of the Lord’s resurrection.—Personal “experience.”—The Lord himself is proof.—The record of his life and sayings could not be invented.—The Jewish nation and Jewish scriptures.—How strong our foundation.—Cast not away your confidence.

WHEN the Lord appointed this breaking of bread, it was that we might be strengthened in the faith of him during his necessary absence. Though there is a sense in which the Gentile proverb is true that, “absence makes the heart grow fonder,” there is a sense in which it works the other way. The absent friend is liable to become the forgotten friend because of the other principle affirmable of frail human nature, “out of sight, out of mind.” Jesus, who “knew what was in man,” knew our need for help in the essential matter of “keeping in memory” the things delivered to his brethren concerning himself. Therefore he said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Therefore also Peter, to whom the Lord pre-eminently confided the work of feeding the flock, in writing, says, “I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.”

The reviving of our memories in relation to the things of Christ is the process of edification or building-up. To revive this memory is to strengthen faith, for faith is the conviction of these things. Whatever strengthens conviction strengthens faith, and faith is the power by which we triumph in our conflict with the weights and the sins which do so easily beset us, within and without. Now, it must be the experience of every properly developed and exercised mind, that nothing tends more powerfully to the preservation of our conviction of the facts testified of Christ, than this weekly act of breaking bread in remembrance of him as appointed. This conviction is in this act nourished within us in a variety of ways. Sometimes one point strikes us forcibly, sometimes another. Take one suggested by words which are pronounced in the breaking of bread almost every time we perform the act — I mean the words of Paul: “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread,” etc.

How often we have heard these words without being impressed with them with all the power with which they are calculated to impress when properly estimated. Let us ponder them a moment. Here is one who says "I have received of the Lord," not "I believe that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread,"—not "I am persuaded by testimony of the apostles,—not "thus it is written in the law or in the prophets," but "*I have received of the Lord.*" Now who speaks thus? Who wrote these words to the Corinthians? There are no two opinions on the answer to this question. Jew and Gentile, unbeliever and disciple, friend and foe, are united here. Paul wrote the words. There is no room for doubt. Realize the simple process by which the fact is demonstrated and universally received. The epistle to the Corinthians exists in many languages. It has done so from the beginning of the Christian era. Ancient MSS. in different tongues, belonging to various countries, are extant at the present day, containing it, not to speak of the thousand or more modern copies, and all these copies give us these words, "I have received of the Lord." How came these words to be there? They could only get into all the copies (ancient and modern, in different countries, among rival religious bodies) through being in the first copies circulated with Paul's consent among the first assemblies of believers in the first century. Additions or mutilations would have been detected in the hands of the first holders, and would at all events have led to diversity and discrepancy in subsequent copies made in different parts, from different copies—the true and the corrupted. There has been nothing of the sort. The epistle is now as it was in the beginning, and therefore the words read in our hearing this morning, are in their English form, the words written by Paul 1,800 years ago. I will not dwell on the point, but it is important to realize the fact. It is morally equivalent to having Paul personally in our midst, and declaring to us, by word of mouth, this morning, that he had received of the Lord the thing delivered to us.

The next obvious matter of reflection is whether Paul spoke the truth when he said he had received them from the Lord. It is well to remember that this is far from being the only place where Paul affirms the direct reception from God, of the things he taught. You will recollect what he says to the Galatians: "I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Also to the Corinthians: "Am I not an apostle? . . . Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" And again: "Last of all he was seen of me also." Did Paul speak truly when he wrote these words, as all the world allows and is obliged to allow that he did? The unbeliever, who, by the way, is not generally a person who has given a very thorough attention to the facts of the case, says, "No doubt Paul thought he was speaking truly." Well this is a great admission. It is something to know that in dealing with the statements of the apostle Paul, you are dealing with the statements of a man to whom the enemy dare not impute

untruth. The whole life of Paul is the guarantee of this. It was a life of self-sacrifice and drawback from beginning to end, because of his testimony for Christ ; a life ending in prison and death, for declaring the truth of the matters in question. Now it is a universal rule that no man acts the part of a hypocrite, and palms off an invented story, except for personal advantage in some shape or other. It is unheard of that a man should persevere with an imposture that had no promise of advantage in it, and that, as a matter of fact, brought loss of all things. Consequently, the way is not open for the suggestion that Paul was a wilful deceiver. There is only one other view of his case by which the force of it can be plausibly evaded, and that is the view of those who say he was an honest madman—under the power of hallucination,—a man who thought he had received things of the Lord, and that he had seen Christ, but who had done nothing of the sort in reality. From this last entrenchment of deceit the enemy is bound to fly when the facts of the case, like a storming party, come on to the attack. For what are the facts? Why, that the occurrences upon which Paul's convictions on the subject were founded, were of a nature to preclude the possibility of hallucination. It was a public occurrence before witnesses in the light of day. As Paul said to Agrippa, who was acquainted with the surroundings of the case in its beginning : " This thing was not done in a corner." " For the king knoweth of these things, before whom I speak freely : for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him." What was the nature of these things to which Paul thus alludes? All the world knows or might know. Paul was engaged in a public errand against the Christians of Damascus under official authority, and attended by a retinue of officials. That which happened on the way to change his course happened not at night, but in the full blaze of the noonday sun : not in solitude, but in the company of all his attendants ; not to himself only, but to all who were with him. The blinding light, " above the brightness of the sun," was seen by all, and felled all to the earth ; the voice which informed Paul of the cause and meaning of the light was heard by all, though not heard in its intelligent articulation, because a voice in Hebrew ; and the effect was not limited to a change of Paul's mind but sealed also his eyes with blindness, and unfitted him to continue his journey, except with the help of those who were with him, and who led him by the hand to Damascus. To talk of " hallucination " in the presence of these attested facts, is to be guilty of a mere perverse resistance of truth under the pretence of wisdom. If these things were hallucination, to what circumstance of experience of real life may we not apply the word? Our eating and our drinking, our thinking and our talking, our staying at home and our travelling, all we hear and all we see, in heaven above and earth beneath, have no better claim to be received as facts than the appearance of Christ to Paul on his way to Damascus. The only difference is that the incident in question happened only once, while the others are always happening, and if this is to be made the ground of objection, then must we refuse to believe in the battle of Waterloo, because it

happened only once ; or in our own birth because we were born only once !

No, no : Paul's case is invincible. An honest man needs no stronger foundation for his faith. As he hears the words, " I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you," he sees before him in comforting vision, the panoramic display of Paul's whole history, bringing with it all its incidents, the conviction of the truth of what Peter said, " We have not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." But though the said honest man needs no stronger foundation for his faith, he has got it. Although there were no case and no evidence but that of Paul, there would be enough to convince us of the resurrection of the Lord ; but we do not depend upon him exclusively. Paul is not alone. Paul was not the first to declare the Lord's resurrection. There were thousands busy before he appeared upon the scene. It was the enterprise and success of these earlier witnesses that inspired his persecuting zeal. Who were they ? The disciples of the Lord—unlettered fishermen of Galilee, who " with great power gave witness of the Lord's resurrection". What did they get for their testimony ? Spoliation, imprisonment, and death. Therefore their testimony is the testimony of honest men. On that grounds did they put forth their testimony ? Personal " experience." " We have eaten and drunk with him since he rose from the dead." " We are his witnesses." " We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard." How came thousands to believe their testimony ? " The Lord worked with them, confirming their words with signs following."

We do not even depend upon them. The Lord himself is proof. He is before us in the record of his life and sayings. That life could not be invented by illiterate men, or by literate men either, for the matter of that, for it is entirely out of the line of human conception. And such a life cannot be explained except on the principle that Jesus was the Son of God. And we do not depend upon it : we have a Jewish nation in the world, and Jewish Scriptures. The history and the nature of both properly estimated, will also lead to the same conclusion, that " God, having at sundry times and divers manners, spoken in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days (of Judah's commonwealth) spoken by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things."

These things being so, behold on how strong a foundation our hopes rest. Christ having risen from the dead, Christ now lives : and Christ now living is our watchful shepherd, though we be not able in the infirmity of mortal nature to discern his hand ; and Christ our watchful shepherd now only waits the appointed time to manifest himself to all whom the Father hath given him, not only in this generation but in the generations of the past, whose harvest to his life-sowing will shortly be garnered with every circumstance of glory and joy. Wherefore, " Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience,

that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry."

The Olive Trees, And The Candlestick

Zechariah.—Testimony for Christ.—Symbol.—Similitudes.—Clue to their significance.—An almond tree.—A seething pot.—Two olive trees, and a seven-branched golden lamp standing.—The meaning.—At first, it seems no answer ; at last, complete and glorious.—“ Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit.”—The particular form signified by the symbol.—The organization through which the spirit of God is to illumine the earth.—Jesus and the saints.—Two sources.—The circumcision.—The uncircumcision.—Jew and Gentile.—The olive tree wild by nature.—The good olive tree.—The flame.—The oil.—The golden pipes.—Moral similitude.—Steadfast faith in His promises in the midst of affliction.—The golden candlestick in the New Testament.—The One Body in the day of its development.—A tried faith giving forth the light.—Applicable to the present time.—The friends of Christ a light-bearing community.—Life a testimony for Christ in some way or other.—False teachers.—Discrimination with regard to men called brethren.—“ Thou hast tried them that say they are apostles, and are not.”—No peace not based upon wisdom.—The truth, in faith and practice, the rule of fellowship.—Faithful contention.—In the true spirit of kindness.—The frequent occurrence of the word “ repent.”—Comfort.—Invited to renew our ways before God.—Heart and hope to every struggling believer.

PETER, in his old age and his last known letter, expressed his anxiety that the brethren should be mindful of what the prophets had written. We shall act in harmony with his desire this morning if we bestow a little attention on that portion of the prophetic writings which has been read from Zechariah (Chapter 4). It may not appear to have much connection with the purpose for which we have met—to remember the Lord in the breaking of bread. We shall find a connection, notwithstanding—a connection it may be said to be found, directly or indirectly, in every part of the Scriptures—not a wonderful thing in view of the fact that all Scripture is given by inspiration, and that the testimony for Christ is the inspiring idea of it all.

The chapter before us presents this testimony in the form of symbol. This may be difficult at first to understand ; but the effect of symbol, after understanding is attained, is to make the matter set forth much more vivid and striking to the understanding than it would be in a merely literal presentation. Considerable use is made of symbol throughout the prophetic writings, though these writings

mainly deal with the literal. Jehovah alludes to the fact in Hosea thus : " I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and *used similitudes*, by the ministry of the prophets " (Chap. 12 : 10). If the similitudes were employed without any clue to their significance, their use would not be enlightening ; but the clues, in almost all cases, are supplied—if not in the immediate context, in some corresponding part of the word. Diligent search and comparison will find them.

In some cases it requires no such search ; they lie on the surface. Thus Jeremiah, at the commencement of his ministry, was caused to see an almond rod. He was asked what he saw ; he said, " I see a rod of an almond tree." " Then said the Lord unto him, Thou hast well seen : for *I will hasten my word to perform it* " (1 : 12). Here an almond rod is constituted the symbol of speed in the execution of the Lord's purpose, so that every time it was seen, it would carry that meaning with it, in the same way that the scales in modern allegory represent justice. The same prophet was shown a seething pot with its face towards the north, the explanation of which was added in these words : " Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land "—namely, a military invasion, as the next verse shows. Consequently a seething pot would become a symbol of the sore affliction arising from war. Amos was shown a basket of garnered fruit (chap. 8 : 1), and informed that it signified the completeness of Israel's iniquity, because of which Jehovah would bear no longer with them.

In the chapter in Zechariah, the symbol is very beautiful, and the explanation glorious when apprehended in the fulness of its meaning. The prophet sees two olive trees, and a seven-branched golden lamp standing between. From each olive tree is a golden pipe communicating with the bowl out of which the seven branches are supplied with oil. This bowl is at the top of the central shaft or stem, and at the bottom or meeting point of the seven branches. The prophet having attentively inspected the apparatus, asked the meaning of it. The answer he received was brief but pregnant. At first it seems no answer ; but at last it appears complete and glorious. The answer was : " Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." In what way did the olive-fed candlestick show forth this idea ? It will not be difficult to perceive this when one or two simple clues are followed up.

This was not the first time the seven-branched golden candlestick had been symbolically employed. It was part of the furniture of the Mosaic tabernacle in the wilderness—a tabernacle of which Paul says it " was a figure for the time then present " (Heb. 9 : 9). It was therefore an element in the " shadow of good things to come " (10 : 1). Those good things to come are all covered by, or summarized in, the intimation early made by Jehovah to Moses, " I will fill the earth with my glory." The gospel is a declaration of this purpose in its detail, and if there is one feature more conspicuous than another as to the agency by which this glorious purpose is to be accomplished, it is the one expressed in the interpretation of the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

olive-fed candlestick : "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

But it may be asked, "Is there no might, is there no power in the spirit of Jehovah?" Yes; in truth there is no might or power besides, for all might and all power are of it. What is the meaning of the contrast then expressed in the interpretation? Obviously the contrast is between human power, and divine power. It is the contrast otherwise expressed in Paul's words thus: "Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called . . . that no flesh should glory in his presence." Not by human might, not by human power, but by the direct operation of the spirit of God, were the things to be accomplished that had been foreshown to Zechariah prior to the vision of the olive-fed candlestick. What these things are may be learned from attentive consideration of the matters exhibited in chapter 3. They are in brief the emancipation from mortality which awaits the chosen of God, the cleansing of the house of Israel and all nations from their present sin-polluted state, and the consequent peace and blessedness that will ensue over all the earth. These results are to be educed "not by might, nor by power, but by the Spirit of Jehovah!" The reformation of the world is not to be accomplished by human power, but by God Himself, operating in the particular form signified by the symbol shown to Zechariah.

What particular form is this? What is meant by the oil combusted in the candlestick, after being drawn from two olive trees? We perceive the answer when we look forward to the organization through which the spirit of God is to illumine the earth in the day of Jehovah's glory. This organization is expressed in its simplest form as Jesus and the saints in corporate completeness, glorified and imperially enthroned. But from whom are the elements of this his One Glorious Body derived? There are two sources recognized in the apostolic writings. Paul having alluded to Israel after the flesh as "the circumcision", among whom he remarks the Gentiles are called "the uncircumcision" (Eph. 2 : 11), says, "He (Christ) is our peace, who hath made both one," abolishing the law "to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross." He further says: "He came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh: for through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." The reference is, of course, to Jew and Gentile. The question is, Are the Jews and Gentiles spoken of under the figure of olive trees? The answer comes at once from Romans 11, where Paul discoursing of the natural relation of Jew and Gentile to the covenants of promise, says to the Gentiles: "If thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" (Rom. 11 : 24). If this idea were enigmatically presented, in reference to the glorious ending of the matter in the day of "the manifestation of the sons of God," how could it be more strikingly

done than in Zechariah's symbolism—an illuminating apparatus fed by material drawn from two olive trees? The flame would tell us of the Spirit which transforms and empowers the saints in the day of their glory; the oil, of the called and chosen persons through whom the Spirit will be manifested; the olive trees, of the two great sections of mankind (as they are grouped in relation to God) from whom the saints are selected. The golden pipes through which the oil was conveyed from the trees to the lampstand, would also tell the principle on which the selection is made. Gold, in moral similitude, is always employed to express the idea of tried faith: "When I am tried, I shall come forth *as gold*" (Job 23 : 10). "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1 : 7). The golden pipes through which all the oil must pass that finds its way to the illuminating lampstand, to be used there in the manifestation of the divine glory, are a symbolic intimation of the fact that "without faith it is impossible to please God," and that no one may hope for a place in the glorified body of Christ who has not, in mortal probation, glorified God by a steadfast faith in His promises in the midst of affliction.

All parts of the symbolism unite in proclaiming the fact that the salvation in due time to be accomplished in the earth is not of human might or power. It is "according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ" (Eph. 1 : 7-10). Even as regards the preliminary adoption of which believers are now subject, it is "not of works, lest any man should boast." "By grace (favour) are they saved through faith." God, in His favour, has condescended to appoint and accept their faith as righteousness; this is not an arrangement of themselves; it is the gift of God, "Who hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will." Much more is the resurrection-sequel "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit," for who can refashion and glorify the dead but God only by His Spirit through Christ to whom He has given the power of using it for this purpose?

By a happy coincidence, we have the symbol of the golden candlestick in the New Testament portion of our reading as well as in our reading from Zechariah. The seven golden candlesticks seen by John in Patmos are not the same as those in Zechariah, except in the sense of being involved as an element of these. Those of Zechariah comprehend those of John in the sense in which the New Jerusalem comprehends the saints as they now are—that is, as a thing involved and not as a thing expressly represented. Zechariah's olive-fed golden candlestick shows us the One Body glorified, those of John, the One Body in the day of its development and probation.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

The symbol is the same because the thing signified is the same, though at a different time and in a different relation. A tried faith giving forth the light of testimony is the idea proximately manifest in the golden candlestick ; in weakness now ; in power and glory in the day of the manifestation of the sons of God.

As applicable to the present time, there is special significance and usefulness in the symbol of the candlestick when we consider the leading idea associated with it. Men do not light a candle, says Jesus, to put it under a table, but to put it on a table that all in the house may have light. To represent a community by a candlestick is to intimate that its function is to maintain and exhibit the light. This is the plain lesson of the apocalyptic candlesticks. "The seven candlesticks are (or represent) the seven ecclesias." Seven stand for the whole. The messages sent to the seven (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea) were each accompanied with the intimation that they were for "him that had ears to hear," generally—therefore the symbols of all similar communities wherever found. The friends of Christ are a light-bearing community in all ages. They speak of and uphold the exhibition of the testimony of God, whether men will hear or forbear. In this they are to be discerned from the sluggish and dark-minded, who are Christians so-called. Jesus says of them plainly, "Ye are the light of the world" (Matt. 5 : 14), and he tells them to let their light shine—(verse 16). Therefore, however unpalatable to men, they are those who "speak of the glory of Jehovah's kingdom and tell of His power." The light appertaining to them is not of or in themselves : it is the light that has come from God by revelation to prophet and apostle, and which, being written, becomes an illumination through the word written to all who study it. Hence, they can all say with the Psalmist, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." They are men in whom the word of Christ dwells richly, as Paul exhorted—in whom therefore the light shines. Where this is the case there will be a showing of the light, in some way or other, every one in his own way and according to his own measure, but still showing the light. Their life will be a testimony for Christ in some way or other ; otherwise they are no part of the candlestick by which Christ is pleased to symbolize his ecclesia in the present state.

Men obtained admission into the community of the believers in the apostolic age who did not possess or ever acquire the characteristics of that community. Jesus refers to them as "men crept in unawares." Paul speaks of them with tears, as "many" who were in reality the enemies of the cross of Christ, and who minded earthly things. Peter describes them as false teachers, whose pernicious ways many should follow, and by reason of whom the way of truth should be evil spoken of. Jesus had foretold the same thing in likening the kingdom of heaven in its doctrinal operations, to a net let down into the sea, into which all manner of fish would come, good and bad. The conclusion to be deduced from this is that it is necessary to exercise discrimination with regard to men called

brethren whose influence and teaching are in opposition to the mind of the Spirit as embodied in the word. There will always be such : we must try every one, yea, ourselves also, by the one standard. Jesus commended the brethren in the seven ecclesias addressed for this very thing : The very first words of the entire series of messages are : " I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil : and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars." On the other hand, we find him condemning the carelessness and indifference of some ecclesias who tolerated wrong teaching in their midst. Thus to Pergamos, he says : " I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam. . . . So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes." To Thyatira, he says, " I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants." The tendency of such teaching is manifestly in palpable contradiction to the spirit of the present age, which inculcates a " charity " that would sacrifice the truth to peace and love. There can be no peace or love acceptable to God that is not based upon that wisdom which as James says, is " *first pure, then peaceable.*" The truth, in faith and practice, is the rule of fellowship and peace with every son of God. He will be considered bigoted and uncharitable ; but what matters the unfavourable opinion of men if the Lord Jesus approve at his coming ? " We must contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." So says an apostle, and he is a higher authority than the uninspired thinkers and speculators of an easy-going age. It but requires to be added that this faithful contention in the hands of true men will not degenerate into cantankerousness or bitterness : in the hands of such, it will be done in the true spirit of kindness and forbearance, anxious only for the ascendancy of truth as Paul prescribes : " The servant of the Lord must not strive : but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves."

A further feature of these messages deserves special notice before closing. It is a feature bringing comfort and encouragement. It is the frequent occurrence of the word " repent." To almost every one of the seven ecclesias, this command is addressed. To such of the Laodiceans who were " neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm," we are not surprised at such an exhortation : but even Ephesus, commended for their vigilance in the detection of spiritual imposture, is similarly advised : " Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works." To Sardis, " having a name to live but being dead," we expect to hear the words addressed, " Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die . . . repent " ; but we find a similar exhortation to Pergamos, of whom it had been testified : " Thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith." It might be suggested that there was little comfort to be found in this general necessity for exhortation to repentance. The comfort lies here : Christ addresses

his own brethren in these messages. He therefore illustrates in this way the fact overlooked in some systems of interpretation : that we are all invited to renew our ways before God. Some have taught that defection in the saints is unpardonable. This is only true as applicable to presumptuous and wilful sin. It is not true as applicable to sins of weakness, such as Peter's denial of the Lord through the combined effect of cold, unsleptness, fear, and the anticipated surrender of Christ to the hands of his enemies. This discrimination is important : it will give heart and hope to every struggling believer. Let us never give in. Let us die fighting. If we are oppressed with the consciousness of past remissness, let us listen to the words of Christ who in addressing the seven ecclesias of Asia, spoke to his brethren everywhere for all time : " Repent, and do the first works."

The Marriage Supper Of The Lamb

The blessedness of being called.—Called now.—What we are called to.—Not to witness the Lamb's union with his Bride.—The Bride stands for the saints.—Who the saints are.—Invited to participate in that glorious union.—A preliminary period.—Several stages.—Acquaintance, love, and betrothal.—Christ introduced to our notice.—The ways of Providence.—Jesus seeks his sheep.—Knocking at their door.—Love sets in.—Love leads to betrothal.—The act of baptism.—Covenant by sacrifice.—Each man's probation.—Judgment.—“How has the covenant been fulfilled?”—Obedience.—The Lord's side of the covenant.—“The manifestation of the sons of God.”—Glorious and gladsome marriage.—Hallelujah !

JOHN was commanded to write, “Blessed are they that are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” The blessedness here affirmed doubtless refers to those who will actually be called within the glorious circle of accepted guests at the Lord's coming. Nevertheless, it is a blessedness for us to contemplate in prospect and in some measure to realize by faith now. Those who are called are called now, and therefore the blessedness may be said to begin now, the only uncertain element in the case being our ignorance of who among those who have been called will be chosen. Every one admitted to the glorious marriage supper will be so admitted on account of the call addressed to him and accepted in these the days of our faith, humiliation, and probation. Assembled round the table this morning, we are in the position of having been called, and as the desire of every sane man must be to have this call consummated and perfected by actual admission to the King's board, let us consider the matter with reference to this most desirable issue.

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

In the first place, let us spend a thought or two on what it is we are called to. "Called to the marriage supper of the Lamb," without further information would suggest merely an invitation in the capacity of guests to witness the Lamb's union with his Bride. No one having knowledge of apostolic applications of the gospel could make the mistake of putting this limited interpretation on John's words, though strange ideas are sometimes heard. We have but to ask who is the Bride on the occasion, to see the matter in its glorious light. We have the answer in the same place that speaks of the blessedness of being called to the marriage supper. We are told that the Bride was "arrayed in fine linen, clean and white," and that this fine linen, as part of the Apocalyptic imagery, represented "the righteousness of saints." (Rev. 19 : 8). Consequently the Bride stands for the saints, and when we know who the saints are, we know who the Bride is. There is no difficulty in judging who the saints are, in the abstract, though we may not be able to discern who are such individually. The recorded work of the apostles in the first century is the best illustration of the constitution and characteristics of true saintship. We need not trouble ourselves with ecclesiastical notions on the subject. All who believed and submitted to the requirements of the Gospel were saints, as in the case of the Roman ecclesia (Rom. 1 : 7-16) ; the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1 : 2) ; the Ephesians (Ephes. 1 : 1) ; the Philippians (Phil. 1 : 1) ; the Colossians (Col. 1 : 2), and so forth.

We are here this morning because like those in Rome, Corinth, and other places who became saints in the days of the apostles, we have believed and obeyed the Gospel of Christ, and are therefore saints in scriptural language. Consequently, we have a special interest in the subject of the Bride brought before us in the words of John. That Bride stands for all the saints in their numerical completeness in the day spoken of by Paul when the Lord comes "to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe" (2 Thess. 1 : 10). Therefore in a sense, she stands for us. To be called to the marriage supper of the Lamb, is therefore to be invited to participate in that glorious union that will take place between Christ and all his brethren in the day of his glory, and not merely to look on while the marriage is taking place. The language suggestive of mere guestship is due to the nature of the blessedness in its individual application. The Bride is the symbol : the declaration of blessedness is addressed to the literal constituents of the symbolic Bride, and consequently takes a literal rather than a symbolic cue.

Now there are several important things suggested by the figure which it has pleased the Spirit of God to employ to represent the glorious event of Christ's union with his brethren. We cannot better occupy the time than by dwelling on them. First, marriage is suggestive of a preliminary period marked by the several stages of acquaintance, love and betrothal. There are all these stages in the history of our connection with Christ. At first, we are "without Christ," a position having "no hope" (Eph. 2 : 12). We are ignorant of and uninterested in him, and have no relation to him

SEASONS OF COMFORT

in any way. We are busy pursuing our own ends, "every one to his own way." The moment arrives when our attention is arrested, Christ is introduced to our notice. It seems all very accidental and common-place. Could we but see behind the scenes, we might see the situation in a different light. Jesus said to his disciples, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." If this were true of them, is it not more true of us? It is also written that "known unto God are all his works from the beginning," and that the saints are "the workmanship of God." If, therefore, we have been "called to be saints," does it not follow that the moment of our acquaintance with Christ was the moment of his beginning to seek us? Granted that unjustified men are not in the precincts of the house of Christ, and therefore outside the purview of his priesthood; yet the house of Christ is made up of men once unjustified, and who calls them from the one state to the other, if not he who testified "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance"? True, this was said concerning Israel, but afterwards the Gentiles were included in the Shepherd of Israel's solicitations by Paul, who said, "We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). This was a general seeking—the seeking of a class as such; but every general form of things comprises the detail, and there can be no question that in this matter there is a process of individual selection included in the general work of the truth. Though many are called to whom Jesus will say at last, "I never knew you"—men gathered in by the work necessary to reach the few chosen vessels, but not contemplated in that work; just as a net let down into the sea to catch a particular kind of fish "encloses all manner of fishes, good and bad"—yet the few whom he will acknowledge in the day of his glory are brought within the power of the Gospel as the result of the ways of Providence. Jesus is the controller and shaper of these ways, and seeks his sheep on dark mountains. The seeking, though special, is veiled; he brings himself under their notice in a perfectly natural way, through the presentation of the testimony. Men of good and honest heart stumble across the truth, as it appears to them, in a very ordinary way, and at a very common-place moment of their experience. There seems nothing unusual in it. In point of fact, a crisis is coming upon them the greatness of which they will afterwards be able to estimate. Christ is seeking them. He is knocking at their door with a very gracious purpose if the dwellers open unto him. He is making himself known, though the fact is unperceived at the time. Looking back, the occupant of the visited house sees it afterwards. Acquaintance is the result. The man comes to know Christ through the testimony to which his mind gradually opens. "Faith cometh by hearing." "He heareth the word of the kingdom (which is the word of Christ) and understandeth it" (Matt. 13:23).

Then comes the second stage—the moral result of the truth perceived and received. Love sets in as the fruit of knowledge. We must first know a friend before we can love him. The love of

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

Christ follows introduction and acquaintance. It must be so : it cannot fail to be so where he is thoroughly known. If from whatever cause, we fail to advance to the love stage, our case is abortive. Jesus requires our love ; the figure of the coming marriage points to the fitness of it. What use or pleasure could he have in men who knew about him but did not love him ? Common reason vindicates the divine requirement in the matter. God is love. His family in its final development will be a family of love, and a man in the family who did not love would be out of place. We look at Paul our example here, "The love of Christ constraineth us," he testifies of his own case, and concerning the brethren, he prayed that they might be "rooted and grounded in love," and "know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Ephes. 3 : 19). John says, "Love is of God : and every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God ; for God is love." "I love them that love me," is the declaration of the Spirit now corporealized in Christ, the Bridegroom.

Knowledge having brought forth love, love leads to betrothal where the right mind exists. The decision to become Christ's is so described by Paul, who said to the Corinthians, "I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." The espousal takes place when the enlightened man or woman enters into covenant with Christ by baptism. The act of baptism, as we all know from the apostolic teaching, is a taking of his name, not, however, with the finality of the conjugal relation which is not reached till the resurrection, but as a preliminary covenant to be afterwards ratified if the conditions are satisfactorily fulfilled. It is being baptized into his death (Rom. 6 : 3) ; with the determination on the part of the baptized to be done with the sinful past as entirely as a dead man is done with his life (verses 11-14). If this determination is successfully performed, "the fruit is unto holiness, and the end everlasting life" (verse 22). The act of baptism is therefore a betrothal and a "covenant by sacrifice" ; a covenant entered into through the sacrifice of Christ. The sacrifice of Christ is, so to speak, placed in the act of baptism, so that qualified people submitting to the act are brought into association with Christ and become acceptable to God in their approach for covenant making. A covenant has two parties to it. In the case in question they are easily discernible. They are the Father, and those who approach Him through Christ in the way appointed. Their respective relations to the covenant are visible in the words of Jehovah, quoted by Paul : "Come out from among them, and be ye separate" : this is our side : this is what we undertake to do. "And I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters" : this is the Father's side : this is what He undertakes to do for us if we carry out our part.

The period of betrothal is the period of each man's probation. The ultimate issue depends upon the divine estimation of this. No man is fit to perform this part of judgment. All judgment is committed to the hands of Christ, before whom we must appear to receive it, and who at his appearing is represented as saying, "Gather my

SEASONS OF COMFORT

saints together unto me : those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice " (Psa. 50 : 5). The supreme question of the hour in its individual application will be, " How has the covenant been fulfilled ? " Have we sustained the part of the chaste virgin getting ready for marriage-presentation to the bridegroom ? Have our affections fastened and fed upon Christ our coming husband ? Have we been as devoted to his affairs as he wishes ?—as tender and loving towards him as he exacts ? The answer to these questions will appear in the shape of our lives which will be made manifest by the faithful reproductive photography of the spirit of God in the hands of Christ. The divine mensuration of love is obedience. A love that is barren of action is useless sentiment, having no value in the divine mode of appraisal. " This is love, that we walk after his commandments " (2 John 6). " Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth " (1 John 3 : 18). " Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you. " Consequently, the deeds of our life will be the index of our hearts. If those deeds, written as a whole, are deeds of conformity to the expressed will of Christ, our part of the covenant will be declared performed : not that there will be a perfect performance in any case, for the congregation of the accepted are a forgiven congregation ; a blood-washed throng. Their judge is their compassionate high priest who occupies the interval of his absence in making request for his house in his own name ; still, there is a point to which obedience and consecration must come before the benefits of the priesthood will be extended. Jesus is the judge of this point, in each case at which he will say, " Thy sins are forgiven thee, " and invite the blessed recipients of his favour to enter into life.

Then will be gloriously performed the Lord's side of the covenant. This is variously expressed in the sure word of promise, " I will receive you and ye shall be my sons and daughters. " We are not finally received as sons and daughters till then. The promise of sonship is for those who overcome : " He that overcometh shall inherit all things ; and I will be his God, and *he shall be my son* " (Rev. 21 : 7). The question of who has overcome is not settled till the day of account at the tribunal of Christ. Consequently not till then is it made manifest who are the sons of God. Hence, the characteristic of that day is said to be " the manifestation of the sons of God " (Rom. 8 : 19). Of the accepted on that occasion, Jesus says, " They are the children of God, *being the children of the resurrection.* " There is such a thing as sonship now, as John and Paul testify, but it is not a completed sonship. It is a sonship based upon adoption on account of faith and obedience ; a sonship commencing with water-birth. But the sonship that awaits the accepted is a sonship based upon identity of nature, and established by a spirit-birth which produces that identity, for " that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. " To be received as sons and daughters in the day of decision is to be accepted as constituents of the Father's house, and conformed to the likeness of the Lord's glorious nature in fulfilment of that other promise to the victor which says, " I will write upon him my new name. " The name

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

of Christ is named on every one who obeys the truth in baptism ; but then there is another and a higher sense in which that name has to be named upon us. His nature has to be imparted to us by that operation of power by the spirit which he will perform upon all whom he judges worthy to receive the gift of life everlasting.

Contemplating all such collectively under the figure of a woman, the betrothal ends in glorious and gladsome marriage—the marriage of and with the Lamb. It is for this joyous consummation that Christ's labours towards his true ecclesia are directed, "that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5 : 27). The time for this presentation is the time when the Roman Babylon is overthrown and the proclamation is made : "Hallelujah : for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him : for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready" (Rev. 19 : 6, 7). Blessed indeed will those be who are called to this feast of love and glory. It is to this blessedness the Gospel invites men : but the invitation falls upon heedless ears as far as the mass of mankind are concerned. If we have been privileged to hear more wisely, let us remember that we sustain responsibility more largely. Having known, loved, and espoused ourselves to Christ, failure of his favour at last will be worse than if we had never heard of him. Be it ours with modest but determined diligence, to get ready for the marriage in the preparation of that "fine linen, clean and white" in which the Bride will be arrayed, by which the Spirit of God tells us we are to understand the righteous actions of the saints.

Bible Wisdom Versus Philosophic Morality

Absence of an appointed reading.—No detriment.—At home in any part of the word.—The book of Proverbs.—The mind of God is unveiled.—The wisdom in the Proverbs.—The “morals” of Gentile philosophy.—One has God in it and the other has not.—“Virtue its own reward.”—Cold and unsatisfying.—God, not man.—The illustration of this feature in its fulness.—Israel’s national economy.—The passover.—The first-fruits.—Private life.—The phylactery.—At every corner God under Israel’s notice.—The righteous men of Israel’s generations.—Moses an exemplification.—Moses at the beginning, Christ at the end.—Morality without “the fear of the Lord” a colourless thing.—Christ in close and living intercourse with his disciples.—Exhibiting the Father.—Powerful testimony.—Speaking parables.—The disciples at a loss.—“What manner of man is this!”—The Father in human manifestation.—The hour when we shall look upon him.—We shall see him in his beauty.—That feast of glory.

NO READINGS are appointed for today in the *Bible Companion* on account of the peculiar position of the day in the calendar. In the absence of an appointed reading, we have had a special selection (Prov. 1 and John 14) : in this we suffer no detriment. It is one of the privileges that come with a knowledge of the truth that we are at home in any part of the word. In our orthodox days, we found large portions of the Bible unuseful : the history heavy and effete ; the Mosaic law cumbersome and dead ; the prophets unintelligible and yielding no particular profit where they could be understood. A theology that fixed our attention on the death state and the sky, naturally robbed of its interest a book that mainly deals with life and the earth. We are emancipated, and “mixing trembling with our mirth,” we rejoice to be able to turn to profitable account whatever portion of Scripture may be brought under our notice.

The book of Proverbs is particularly easy of digestion and rich in its nourishment of the new man. It is a book possessing a higher character than is usually allowed for it in our day. It is common to think of it as a book of moral maxims owing their excellence to Solomon’s natural sagacity. It is a book of moral maxims truly, but it is much more : it is a book of revelation—it is a book in which the mind of God is unveiled, in a correct and authoritative declaration of truth not accessible to man in nature. We learn this from the frequent quotation of it by the apostles as an authority in divine matters, and from the information that what superiority of wisdom Solomon may have displayed in its composition was a direct gift from God (1 Kings 4 : 29). Its position in the compiled Scriptures of which Jesus says, “they cannot be broken,” is alone conclusive on this point.

When we compare the wisdom embodied in the Proverbs with the "morals" of Gentile philosophy, of whatsoever school, we discover a great contrast and a further evidence of divinity. The difference may be said to be this, that one has God in it and the other has not. Perhaps this needs further explanation. The explanation is simple. If you study the moral maxims of the schools, you will find they are recommended and inculcated for their own sakes just as the bath and exercise in the open air would be recommended as good for health. The idea of God may be recognized in the abstract, but not as the moving spring of philosophic morality. The practice of virtue "for its own sake," and "virtue its own reward," are phrases that express the philosophic view. In this view, the mental eye is turned on our own mechanism, so to speak, or the mechanism of the universe, and not on the power and wisdom in which that mechanism had its origin. This is cold and unsatisfying for many reasons, but chiefly because of our inability to understand things as they exist. Bible wisdom is a complete contrast to this. God, not man : the Creator, not His work : His revealed will, not human guesses, are constantly pressed upon our notice. The history of God's work on earth, is the illustration of this feature in its fulness. Abraham leaves his native Ur of the Chaldees : why? Because Jehovah commanded him. His posterity leave Egypt : why? Because God appeared to Moses and strengthened his hand for their deliverance. They receive a law by the hand of that wonderful and faithful servant : and what are its characteristics? The exhibition of God to the national and individual mind by every method and in every variety of aspect. The first command was : "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." The first announcement of the tables of the covenant was : "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt." The first feature of the national economy was the selection of a place where Jehovah should place His name. The first duty of every Israelite in every experience of life had to do with this centre of the nation's existence in some way or other. His first-born was Jehovah's, and (until the adoption of the Levites) had to be redeemed by the offering of sacrifice in recollection of the fact that God smote the first-born of Egypt in the day that Israel was redeemed by the observance of the passover. The first operation to which he had to subject his male children was to circumcise them, in token of the covenant that made the nation God's nation. The first-fruits of his harvest were to be presented formally to God, at the feast of ingathering. Three times a year, his whole family had to appear before God in the place appointed, to rejoice and give thanks in connection with some special form of divine indebtedness. His private life was similarly bent towards God. He was to speak of Jehovah and His doings, and His laws, to his children continually. He was to write the leading statutes of the law against his door posts, that his eye and his heart might be continually in contact with them and not forget them. He was for the same purpose to wear a border of blue on his garment, that looking upon it, he might remember Jehovah and His statutes.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

He was to avoid certain articles of food in obedience to Jehovah's commandment, that he might be holy to Jehovah. He was for the same reason to avoid certain objects as causes of defilement : such as the dead body of any creature, or any piece of furniture with which a defiled person had been in contact. In every transgression he was to repair to the priest in confession with the appointed sacrifice.

At every turn and corner, God was kept under Israel's notice. God was the pivot of the national existence—the regulating power of individual life : not that this was realized in fact. Israel forgot God and turned aside from His commandments, and were dispersed among the nations as at this day ; but the aim and purpose of the Mosaic economy was to keep Jehovah before Israel's mind as prominently and constantly as He was before the mind of David and all the righteous men of Israel's generations. Moses was himself an exemplification of the right thing in the case. He was no speculating philosopher or babbler about abstractions. He was a robust, strong-minded receiver of facts, and the fact of facts pressed home upon his notice was the Creator's existence, and His power, volition and requirements. "There arose not a prophet since in Israel like to Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." So it was written of Israel's early generations under the law : but late in Israel's history, we are permitted to see a greater than Moses—the prophet like unto Moses, of whom Moses testified beforehand : "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me : him ye shall hear." This prophet like unto Moses, but exceeding the greatness of Moses in all points, appeared at "the end of the (Mosaic) world," yet as part and parcel of it, in a sense, for "God sent forth his Son . . . *made under the law.*" Both historically and spiritually he was "the end of the law." Moses at the beginning, Christ at the end : Israel's subjection to the law between—the fabric of righteousness resting on two glorious pillars, and the first feature of that righteousness being Jehovah's existence, service, and fear, ignored by Gentile philosophy.

The lesson of this history is the maxim written by Solomon as the key note of his Proverbs (1 : 7) : "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Morality without this "fear of the Lord" is an indeterminate colourless thing. It is a husk without the kernel, flesh without blood, a form of wisdom minus the life-giving power. Some may take refuge in the idea that as Christ is "the end of the law for righteousness," he is the end of it in all senses, and therefore an end to that urgent ascendancy of Jehovah which the law sought to establish in all relations of life in the midst of Israel. Some would call this "the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free"—liberty to withdraw our thoughts from God ! Such an idea must disappear before a close acquaintance with what is revealed to us concerning Christ. Let us take what is brought before us in the selection from John this morning.

Here we have Christ in close and living intercourse with his disciples. What is the theme of his discourse ? Does he indulge in abstract moralizings of the modern "philosophic" order ? Far

from it. He goes to the root of the matter, of all matters, in exhibiting the Father to their attention. God is the centre of all he has to say. His tuition of the disciples is best described in his own words, as used in prayer to the Father: "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me" (John 17:6). Instead of the appearance of Christ having lessened the force of the Mosaic lesson, it has illustrated and brought it home more powerfully. We cannot look at Christ scripturally without seeing God, for the scriptural exhibition of Christ is this: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).

Jesus gives powerful testimony to this aspect of the case in the chapter read from John. He says, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." Let us trace this saying from its rise in the beginning of the conversation so as to realize all its force. He was seeking to comfort the disciples in prospect of his approaching separation from them. He said, "I go to prepare a place for you," adding, "whither I go ye know, and the way ye know." Had he said no more, we might have supposed he meant his ascension—the way to the Father's presence through space; but Thomas, feeling a lack of understanding, said, "Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?" in answer to which, Jesus said, "I am the way," which shows that the "whither" of Christ's then impending separation and the way thereto, had relation to what was to be accomplished in his own person (by death and resurrection) in opening the way to the Father: for he immediately added, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." Why should Jesus assume that his disciples knew the way, saying to them "the way ye know"? Because he had frequently informed them that he would be delivered into the hands of the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem, and be by them condemned to death, and killed, but raised again the third day (Luke 18:31). But they did not understand: consequently, when Jesus spoke of going to prepare a place for them, they felt he was speaking parables, which, no doubt, he was to a certain extent (John 17:25), though parables not so utterly dark as the disciples felt them to be. Their undiscernment evoked from him a rebuke which must have hit hard: "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also," which was as much as to say that they had not yet discerned him in his true relation. This was doubtless true, for though they confessed him as the Christ, they had not yet risen to a scriptural apprehension of all that the Christship involved. They knew the Messiah as the King of Israel in the Davidic succession, but there was something much greater than that, leading David to address his son as "Lord." Jesus added the astounding statement: "From henceforth ye know him (the Father) and have seen him." What could this mean? The disciples were at a loss. Nothing was

SEASONS OF COMFORT

more in harmony with their desires and aspirations than to know the Father. As men of the divinely approved stamp though not yet apprehending their Lord and Master, they shared the sentiment of Moses when he said, "Lord, show me thy glory," and the saying of David, "As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God : when shall I come and appear before God ?" But what could Jesus mean by saying they had seen the Father ? Philip gave expression to their general mind : "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." This was their highest desire. What a rejoinder this drew forth : "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip ? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father ; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father ?" Well might the disciples exclaim as they did on another occasion : "What manner of man is this ?" He was the manner of man defined in the prophetic delineation : "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." He was the word made flesh—God manifest in the flesh—the character of God exhibited in a Son begotten of God by the Spirit, of the seed of David according to the flesh ; and the power and presence of God manifested to Israel, after the anointing of this Son begotten with the Holy Spirit without measure on his attaining maturity. Those looking discerningly on Jesus, looked on the Father in human manifestation. But did Jesus mean he was the Father in the primary sense ? His own words preclude such a meaning. Having saddened his disciples by the intimation that he was about to leave them for the presence of the Father, he said : "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father : for *my Father is greater than I*" (14 : 28). Although, therefore, he said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," he did not mean there was no Father separate from him dwelling in unapproachable light. He explained himself in the words immediately following those we are considering : "Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me ? The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself : but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." The scriptural teaching concerning God enables us to understand this. When we realize that Jehovah dwells in the heavens (Psa. 123 : 1) yet fills the universe (Jer. 23 : 23-24) by the invincible energy of His Spirit (Psa. 139 : 7-12), and that thus, though in far distant heaven (Eccl. 5 : 2), He is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17 : 27-8), we are enabled in a small measure to understand how the special manifestation of His wisdom, character and power in "the man Christ Jesus," constituted that man Christ Jesus an exhibition of the Father to all who intelligently discern him, without, at the same time, interfering with that subordinate aspect in which the Lord presented himself as the Son who did nothing of himself.

We are not privileged as the disciples were when this conversation took place. We have not the Lord in our midst. We are assembled to obey the same Lord : to call him to our remembrance

in the way appointed by himself, and to fan the flame of that love for him which the gospel has enkindled in our hearts. And while enjoying this present privilege, we are permitted to contemplate the hour that will certainly arrive when we shall look upon him as they looked upon him, and hear his voice as they heard, and rejoice in his love as they did. Greater indeed will be our privilege than that of the disciples in the days that are past; for if the Lord do us the unspeakable honour of counting us among his friends in that day, we shall see him in his beauty instead of in his weakness, and we shall share in his joy instead of his suffering, and rejoice in the promised change from this corruptible instead of toiling in a service in which we groan being burdened. And every joy of salvation will be intensified by the immensity and completeness of the multitude of the saints of every age who will sit down to that feast of glory together, ascribing all thanksgiving and praise to him that sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb, for ever.

In Collision With Society

Wisdom by the mouth of Solomon.—Jesus the central idea.—The case of Christ depicted.—A contrast.—Modern ideal of charitableness.—A bad sign.—The reason.—The world.—Much praising of the wicked.—Under the law to Christ.—Paul's life an example.—The mere pugnacity of the flesh.—Not keepers of the law.—A meek, quiet, loving class.—Mere wranglers.—A constant mortification in collision with society.—Need consolation.—Prayer sometimes an abomination.—British society.—Stand clear of compromise.—“The keeping of the commandments of God.”—Not a living man who is perfect.—What shall we do?—Abandon hope?—Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.—“All manner of sin forgiven but this.”—Not always confessing and never forsaking.—Political light.—A lion, a bear.—Gentile government.—The kingdom of God.—Taking part in the politics of the world.—The Shepherd.—Dispensation of the age to come.—Waiting.—The earth filled with gladness.

THIS morning, we listen to the voice of wisdom by the mouth of Solomon, whose words are apostolically commended to us as the words of the Spirit (Heb. 12 : 5 ; 2 Tim. 3 : 16), though the man by whom they were spoken did not in his latter days stand forth as a conspicuous illustration of those words obeyed. Let us select just a few of the leading points in the chapter read (Prov. 28) as the subject of the morning's contemplations in connection with the breaking of bread. They are not inappropriate to the breaking of bread, although it might not seem there was any connection. The fact is, whatever the Spirit of God has said, may be traced to a living connection with the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

central idea of the table of the Lord. Jesus, as that central idea, is the embodiment of wisdom for present action, and hope for those unsatisfied aspirations which continually impel us to the contemplation of the future for the prospect of their fulfilment. Consequently, the manifestations of that Spirit of wisdom and hope, in all the times that went before him, will be found of one nature with him.

Take for example the declarations of verse 4 : " They that forsake the law praise the wicked : but such as keep the law contend with them." Here we have the case of Christ depicted, and a cue supplied for the guidance of all his brethren. Jesus was a keeper of the law. He was "made under the law" (Gal. 4 : 4), and was obedient in all things. And what was his relation to "the wicked" around him—the Scribes and the Pharisees, and leaders of the people, of whom he said that they outwardly appeared righteous unto men but were full of all unrighteousness ? He contended with them. He both opposed them personally and warned the people against them (Luke 20 : 46 ; Matt. 23 : 13-39). In this he exemplified a line of deportment greatly in contrast with what is considered the right and the Christian thing in our day. To speak well of everybody and "let other people enjoy their own opinions" : this is the modern ideal of charitableness. To die without an enemy is considered the highest pitch of moral achievement. "He died without an enemy" : this is regarded as the finest thing that can be said of a dead man. What can we say but that such sentiments cannot be harmonized with the case of Christ who died in the midst and at the hand of enemies, and who, telling his disciples of the coming hatred they would experience, said, "If the world hate you, ye know it hated me before it hated you" (John 15 : 18). From a divine standpoint, the fact of a man's having no enemies is a bad sign. Jesus says, "Woe unto you when all men speak well of you." The reason of this is germinally contained in the verse under consideration. The wicked love to be praised, and speak well of those who praise them. They hate those who do not praise them. A man who "keeps the law" cannot praise them. His own love of the law would disincline him : the commandment itself forbids it. Only those who forsake the law praise them, and there are many such. The world is made up of them. The world lieth in wickedness. Consequently, there is much praising of the wicked. It is to be heard all round : in the press, in public meetings, in the pulpit, in private conversation—everywhere. In this praise, it would be pleasant and advantageous to join, but the keepers of the law cannot join. Consequently, they are hated ; but they are hated yet the more because of their further attitude. "Such as keep the law *contend with them.*"

It may be said that as we are not under the law of Moses, the maxim cannot apply. This would be a short-sighted conclusion. Though we are not under that particular form of divine commandment, we are "not without law to God, but under the law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9 : 21). And the principles governing obedience to God are the same under one form of command as another. "Such as keep the law," whatever it may be, "contend with" those who are not subject

to it, and who are therefore the wicked. Paul's life is an example. His life was a continual contention with evil men ; and Jude lays it down that we must " contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints " (verse 3). Of course there is such a thing as being " contentious " : this is a different thing. We must carefully distinguish between the mere pugnacity of the flesh and a faithful insistence on the will of God. Lovers of " debate, wrath, strife, seditions, malignity, deceit," are themselves the wicked, even if the subject of their debate be furnished by themes of Bible origin. The contentions of such do not come within the commendation of Prov. 28 : 4. Those who are commended are " those who *keep the law*," and men do not keep the law who do not obey " the first and great commandment " : " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," and the second which is like unto it : " and thy neighbour as thyself." Men who are proud, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, boasters, inventors of evil things, covenant breakers, implacable, unmerciful, are not keepers of the law, however much they may contend about the law or the gospel.

The passage we are considering contemplates a quiet, loving class, whose perception of right and sense of duty impel them to a contention with those who would lead men from the way of life. They contend with the wicked ; they do not praise them, yet are they good men, kind men, gentle, faithful, loving men, whom the circumstances of the present evil world force into an attitude of hostility to all around them. Mere wranglers will make a mistake if they take any comfort from Solomon's words : yet men of God in conflict with the outer darkness may take comfort ; they need it. It would be much pleasanter to be on terms of harmony with the world in general. It would be agreeable to the natural man and advantageous every way to join in the general gratulations and mutual admiration that are characteristic of both public and private life as it now is. It is a constant mortification to be in collision with society on points of duty, points of faith, points of policy. The battle becomes harder as time advances and nature's fainting force abates. Therefore we need the consolation to be found in the Spirit's commendation by Solomon and in the exhibition of the same conflict, in unmistakable lines and colours in the case of the Lord Jesus, " who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself." We may well be content to be in his company in whatever light we may be regarded by our contemporaries of the Gentiles.

Then we have to consider the solemn admonition involved in verse 9 : " He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination." This is very unlike the doctrine to which the religious world is accustomed ; but it is the only doctrine we need care to know, for it is true. For a man's prayer to be acceptable, he must be subject to the will of God as revealed. This is God's own declaration : " To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and that *trembleth at my word*." There are times when prayer is an abomination to God, and we often see such times around us. James says : " The prayer of a righteous man availeth

much," which implies that in the opposite case—the case of an unrighteous man—prayer is what Solomon styles it, "an abomination." This enables us rightly to estimate the moral character of the religious "services" of the present day in church and chapel. Religion is almost made to consist of praying, in the modern system. Little respect is had to the attitude to the commandments of God of those who pray. Though professedly subject to Paul, they have forgotten Paul's declaration that the vengeance of Christ at his coming is "for them that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1 : 8, 9), and that he is "the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him" (Heb. 5 : 9). The things Christ has commanded to be done are not done : while things he has forbidden are practised with all composure and assurance. We all know this flagrantly to be the case in the society in which we live, and move, and have our being. Our anxiety ought to be to stand clear of compromise in such a state of things. "Keep ourselves unspotted from the world." "He that doeth righteousness is righteous" (1 John 3 : 7). And righteousness is "the keeping of the commandments of God." There is no other standard of well-doing than this. Philosophic conceptions of morality are misleading and the mere product of human speculation. The true philosophy is the revelation of the God of Israel. This, though deep as the fathomless ocean, is simple enough for the guidance of a child. What has God commanded us to do and not to do? This may be learnt by the diligent study of the Scriptures, and "in the keeping of his commandments there is great reward" (Psa. 19 : 11). If we obey not his commandments, we are unrighteous, on however good terms we are with ourselves. If we turn away from listening to them, for whatever reason, our very prayers will be abomination. So it is written.

The chapter, however, contains consolation in a direction where most of us may feel it is needed. We all know it is written that "there liveth not a man that doeth good and sinneth not" : that is, there is not a living man who is perfect. We can all confirm this from experience of ourselves and others. All must, some time or other, feel the wretchedness arising from the fact stated by Paul concerning himself, and which is true of all : "I find a law that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man : but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7 : 21). Now what shall we do with regard to this wretchedness? Shall we give in to it and abandon hope? There is only one case in which men may give themselves up to despair. Jesus says, "All manner of sin shall be forgiven unto men except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which hath never forgiveness." This blasphemy against the Holy Spirit was a speaking against and attributing the work of the Holy Spirit to other agency, in the face of incontestable evidence of its divine character. We are not in a position in our day to be guilty of this sin. The "works" by which the divinity of the Holy Spirit's work through Christ was attested, and the exhibition of which was the ground of the responsi-

bility of those who saw them (John 15 : 24), have been suspended for generations. We have but the written testimony, unsupported by miracle. Whether speaking against the testimony in this state of circumstances is speaking against the Holy Spirit in the sense of Christ's words, is extremely doubtful. We may, therefore, freely rest on the first part of Christ's otherwise terrible words : "All manner of sin shall be forgiven unto men." Our shortcoming, our failings, our weaknesses, our sins, will receive merciful consideration. This is the consolation in the chapter. You will find the form of it in verse 13 : "Whoso confesseth his sins and forsaketh them shall have mercy." Let us, however, realize the conditions. There are two things required : confession and abandonment. Sins will not be forgiven as a matter of course. "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper." This is the state of things with which mercy is contrasted : there must be no concealment : there must be no pretence of faultlessness : there must be admission of fault, yea, a humble, contrite, broken-hearted recognition of our unworthiness ; and more than this, there must be amendment—a ceasing to do evil, a learning to do well (Isa. i : 16). We must not be always confessing and never forsaking our sins : there must be a growth in holiness—an increase of stature in Christ—a growing in the knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might purify us unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. The sins of the righteous will be forgiven : but "if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear ?" (1 Pet. 4 : 18).

There is political light of a practical character in one of the statements in verse 15 : "As a roaring lion, and a ranging bear, so is a wicked ruler over the poor people." We know something of wicked rulers. The constitution of the world at the present time is, in fact, a constitution of wicked rulership. Here we have a simile illustrative of its character : a lion, a bear, The application in the verse is individual, but we may give it a wider scope. The same animals have been symbolically used in a larger way. They are two of the four Beasts used in the vision shown to Daniel to represent the four great Gentile monarchies. Their employment indicates *the divine estimate of the nature of Gentile government*. Imagine a lion in the street—a bear at large : how different from a father and a friend of the people. This is the difference between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of God—a glorious man on a throne, a lamb on the Mount Zion, a city of geometrical symmetry and dazzling brightness, having the glory of God like unto a stone most precious. As the brethren of Christ, we belong to the latter. We are not of the Lion and the Bear and the Great Red Dragon party. We have here no continuing city. Our citizenship is in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour to bless all the families of the earth. Like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, concerning the promises, we have become "persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth." Those who take part in the politics of the world, confess that they belong to the wicked rulership of the present darkness, which is destined to flee away before the glorious sunrise of

Christ's presence. We, who abstain, "declare plainly that we seek a country." We do not abstain because we have no interest in mankind and their affairs; but because by the gospel, we have been called out from among them during the Lion and Bear dispensations, to prepare for a place in the Glorious Shepherd dispensation of the age to come, when God will be glorified and mankind enlightened and blessed in all the earth. The establishment of that dispensation is connected with a country—the country promised, which in the days of the fulfilment will be a heavenly country. In preparation for a permanent place in this heavenly country in the age to come, we accept a position of obscurity during the Lion and Bear ascendancy. We do so deliberately, in patient hope, and the turn of the saints will certainly come. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." "The righteous shall be glad in the Lord." In view of this time, Jesus said, "Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh." When this becomes fact, the world will see a sudden exemplification of one of the things Solomon says in this chapter: "When righteous men do rejoice, there is great glory." "When the wicked perish, the righteous increase." When the saints reign with Christ, when the present governments shall have been broken to pieces by his powerful arm, men will be blessed everywhere, and the earth be filled with gladness. Righteousness will prevail like an ocean. No marvel that the prospect of such a consummation should find expression in David's jubilant summons to all nature to rejoice: "Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: . . . Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together before the Lord; for he cometh to judge the earth: with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity."

The Reality Of God In History

The mighty matters of Israelitish history.—The Amorite panic.—The hand of God.—Israel's triumph.—God with them.—The one glorious spot in the gloomy history of this our world.—The marvel of all history.—The programme of the earth's deliverance.—The first Adam in multitude doing the preparation work.—The ministry of the prophets.—Christ's appearing.—A humanizing effect produced.—The basis of European civilization.—Israel terrible again.—The adoption in Christ Jesus.—Fellow-citizens.—High destiny.—Patient hope.—The tarrying.—Familiar with marvels.—Not mistaking the appearance of things.—The voice of Christ again heard.—The brethren of whom Paul writes.—Their joyful submission to spoliation.—Our course one of self-denial.—Great joy set before us.—Every good and desirable thing.—The prosperity of the wicked.—Wait a little.—Glory, like the sun long hidden.

No longer aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, it is our pleasure to ponder the mighty matters of Israelitish history—a history unlike all other histories—a history involving futurity because of the materials that went to make it up. Isaiah alludes to Israel as a nation “terrible from their beginning hitherto.” In the portion read from Joshua, we have illustration of what this means. The Amorite nations were seized with a panic on Israel's approach. If we ask the reason of this panic, we touch the hand of God. How came it that a nation of slaves, intractable and rebellious against Moses, should inspire terror in nations great and mighty, with trained soldiers, and cities walled to heaven? Rahab indicates the answer in her speech to the spies: “We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when ye came out of Egypt, and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man because of you; for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above and in earth beneath.” This was a perfectly reasonable explanation of the fear created by Israel's approach. It is the only reasonable explanation of Israel's triumph over the warlike nations of Canaan. Those who deny the miraculous co-operation of God with Israel in the Exodus, create an insoluble historical problem. The fact of the Exodus cannot be disputed; the fact of the military conquest of Canaan forty years afterwards is equally beyond question. If God were not with Israel, how came a multitude of people to subsist in the wilderness, away from all source of supply? How came they to remain in such a place at all? And how came they to be able to live in the presence of the military league formed against them in Canaan when they entered; not to speak of their total discomfiture of that league, and the overthrow of the nations that entered into it?

But God was with them. It is this fact that gives the history of Israel its meaning, both as regards the past and the future. It is the one glorious spot in the gloomy history of this our world. It was first eulogized by Moses, when he said : " Ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it ? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live ? Or hath God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes ? " (Deut. 4 : 32 - 34).

It is the marvel of all history that God should have formed and used and guided a nation as He did in the case of Israel, and that that nation should be extant to the present day in the very position foretold by Moses over three thousand years ago—scattered among all other nations. It is a marvel with a meaning. It is no mere episode. It is not a mere passage of history. It is part of a plan. We comprehend the plan in the light of the prophets evangelized to us by the apostles of the Lord Jesus. The plan is in fact the programme of the earth's deliverance in harmony with the honour of the earth's Possessor and Creator. The plan consummated shows us the earth " full of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea " ; and Israel restored, the head of a family of enlightened and happy nations, united in the service of Israel's God. The foundation of the plan had to be laid ages ago. There had to be a gradual working up from a time when the earth was poorly peopled and overgrown with forest, to a time of immense population and extensive subjugation of the soil and occupation of the earth with cities. To replenish the earth and subdue it is the mission of the first Adam. An empty world would have been a poor theatre for the revelation of the glory of the Lord. It requires an " all flesh " to " see it together." And this " all flesh " requires in some measure to be civilized. A world of Zulus would not be a suitable basis for the interesting work of God.

While the first Adam in multitude has been doing the physical part of the preparation work—subduing the earth everywhere and fitting it for habitation, God has accomplished the other part in what He has done with Israel. He brought them miraculously from Egypt that they in the first instance might know His name and turn from the idols which all the world worshipped. Moses told them this was the object of the miracles : " To thee it was showed, that thou mightest know that the Lord he is God : there is none else beside him. . . . Know therefore this day, and consider it in thine heart, that the Lord he is God in heaven above, and in the earth beneath " (Deut. 4 : 35, 39). God's message to Pharaoh reveals the same object : " For this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power ; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth " (Exodus 9 : 16). The succeeding history of Israel

tends to the same point. The knowledge of God was kept alive by the ministry of the prophets, and His requirements by the Mosaic service. When Christ appeared, there was an extension of the work. A miraculously-attested embassy going out from Judæa in the name of Christ, summoned "all men everywhere to repent," and to "turn to God from idols, to serve the living and the true God, and to wait for his son from heaven". Though the result of this appeal was not very bountiful as regards widespread and effectual "repentance towards God and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," yet a humanizing effect was produced in vast communities of the human race. The basis of European civilization was laid in the substitution, in 300 years, of State Christianity for Paganism as the religious constitution of the Roman Empire. The work of the apostles while it accomplished the primary object of taking out a people as the associates of Christ in his coming glory, has indirectly reclaimed the population of Europe from a state of utter barbarism to a state of comparative enlightenment, in which they are more fit to be operated upon by that dispensation of judgment and instruction which is about to come into force in all the world.

The nation, "terrible from their beginning hitherto," is a nation whose future is bound up with this coming dispensation. Though "meted out and trodden down," God has not cast them off for ever. This He cannot do, for He has pledged His word to the contrary: "If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel, for all that they have done" (Jer. 31 : 37). "Though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet I will not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure" (30 : 11). When this "correction in measure" has reached its appointed limits, the nation terrible from their beginning hitherto will become terrible again in the same way. Israel is again to be employed as the instrument of those wonderful acts by which the world, at the coming of Christ, is to be taught righteousness. So, Zechariah testifies, as you know, in the language of prophecy uttered in the past tense: "The Lord of hosts hath visited his flock the house of Judah, and hath made them as his goodly horse in the battle: . . . and they shall be as mighty men, which tread down their enemies in the mire of the streets in the battle: . . . and I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them again to place them; for I have mercy upon them: and they shall be as though I had not cast them off." A direct parallel is drawn in Micah between these coming days and Egyptian deliverance: "According to the days of thy coming out of the land of Egypt will I show unto him marvellous things. The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf. They shall lick the dust like a serpent, they shall move out of their holes like worms of the earth: they shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of thee" (7 : 15).

In the prospect of these things, we have been made personally concerned by the adoption of which we have become the subjects in

SEASONS OF COMFORT

the obedience of the gospel. Before that adoption, we had no connection with them. We were Gentiles "afar off," and without hope (Eph. 2 : 12) ; but now in Christ Jesus we have been brought nigh, and are fellow-citizens with the saints, and partakers of the covenants of promise. This language is expressive not merely of a change of mind and disposition in ourselves, but a change in our relation to those outward coming events which will shortly fill the world, first with woe, and then with blessing. The saints, as you know, are to "execute the judgment written" (Psa. 149 : 9 ; Dan. 7 : 22 ; 1 Cor. 6 : 2), and they are to sit on the throne with Christ, and rule the world in righteousness (Rev. 3 : 21 ; 2 Tim. 2 : 12 ; Isa. 32 : 1 ; Dan. 7 : 27).

To this high destiny we have been called by the gospel. For the realization of it we are waiting in patient hope. We have need of patience. Men regard our expectation as chimerical, and worse ; nature seems to mock our hope ; time prolongs and the heart is liable to sicken. Let us be on our guard. Our fitness for the house of Christ hangs upon our endurance to our little end : "Whose house are we if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3 : 6). None but those who lose their hold on the facts will let go the hope. The hope is sure and the hope is great. The word of divine consolation says, "Yet a little while and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry"—that is, he will not tarry always. He had to tarry a while. It was part of the plan. It was "needful," said Jesus, and for more reasons than we in our short-sightedness can at present realize. But the tarrying is not so great as it seems. It seems long to us because we are small. Our conceptions of things are not the standard of measurement in the case. The plan is a plan of God, and we must look at it from the standpoint of Him with whom a thousand years are as a watch in the night. From this point of view "the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment." David truly says, "*Yet a little while*, and the wicked shall not be : yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth ; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

The day was when Moses performed the wonderful works of God in the sight of Israel. Israel became familiar with the marvels : their effect waned : Israel growing disobedient came under punishment, and the time passed on. A long interval of inaction elapsed. The day came when Jesus, walking among men, said : "I am the light of the world : he that believeth in me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." Men listened to his words and were struck, for he spake as one having authority and not as the scribes : but the effect was not deep. His wonderful words and works became common things ; and those who profited by them crucified him. The miraculously-attested testimony of his resurrection filled the Roman world for a while with light and hope ; but evil men prostituted the privileges of the apostolic age for their own exaltation. They grew accustomed to and then slighted the presence of the

apostles. The apostles died : the light went out : a corruption of their doctrines became popular : the times of the Gentiles prevailed in all their darkness : and now we have come on the scene. Let us not mistake the appearance of things. The state of things we have opened our eyes upon is utterly transient. The state of things we now see will shortly be no more seen for ever. The day will as certainly come as the days that are past, when the voice of Christ will again be heard, but this time with power and with enduring effect—an effect that will make him the accepted head of all mankind and the possessor of the utmost bounds of the earth. If we remain steadfast in this gloom, ours will be the glory when it dawns. Well might Paul say, “Cast not away therefore your confidence, *which hath great recompense of reward.*”

Paul addressed this exhortation to some who had suffered much more than we are ever likely to do. He says they “endured a great fight of afflictions,” and became a gazing stock of the ignorant through the reproach attaching to their profession of the faith, and “partly while they became companions of them that were so used.” Not only does he show us that they had been great sufferers ; he acquaints us with the way they took it ; ye “took joyfully the spoiling of your goods.” It is for us to look back and realize this. The brethren of whom Paul writes these things were in their day flesh and blood like ourselves, with all the sensibilities, and affections, and anxieties, and fears of which we find ourselves possessed. The picture of their joyful submission to spoliation ought to be of some use to us. It ought to help us the more easily to endure the suffering that comes to our lot, for doubtless our position is a position of suffering though not of the same order as that of our brethren of the first century. We suffer reproach on account of our hope ; we suffer disadvantage on account of the law of Christ which separates us from the friendship of the world, and unfits us for fighting on equal terms with the world, the battle of the present life ; we suffer deprivation in being forbidden to resist evil or follow pleasure. Our whole course is one of self-denial—“strangers,” not at home where we are ; “pilgrims”—passing on to another destination. Therefore, like the Hebrews, we have “need of patience.” It comes with the contemplation of those who have trodden the same path before us, but especially in the contemplation of the results of our course. Jesus himself was strengthened from this source : “For the joy set before him he endured the cross, despising the shame.”

There is great joy set before us. Unutterable joy is involved in the consummation expressed in the few words with which Paul completes his sentence : “Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, *ye might receive the promise.*” This receiving of the promise is the receiving of the things promised ; and what they are the gospel has caused us to know. They comprise every good and desirable thing which it is possible for the heart of man to conceive, and which it is impossible for the heart of man to conceive. We look into the earth and behold darkness and sorrow in the toiling and stricken masses of mortals who barely

manage to live, and whose life at that is ignoble, joyless, and burdensome. We listen to the promises ; they tell us of the purpose of God to spread a feast of fat things for all people, which will make the nations glad and sing for joy, and call its founder blessed. We survey with agony the prosperity of the wicked, and the pomp and renown of men who have no claim to honour but the possession of riches, which they heap to themselves in a towering monopoly, protected by law which knows no mercy for the poor, and takes no account of justice. The promises give us the prospect of an hour when God will overturn the house of the wicked in the tempest of His anger, and set up the house of the righteous in all the earth in its place. We contemplate our own feeble natures, and our own dwarfed, and pinched, and narrowed surroundings, yearning to bless, but powerless to lift a finger in alleviation of the misery around us. The gospel tells us to wait a little, and this poor body will be regenerated and immortalized ; and power and wealth put into the hands of the sons of God everywhere, for the blessing of all families of the earth. There is no evil we can think of that a cure is not provided for in the gospel ; no good we can desire but what is embraced in its covenants. Having been put in possession of this most blessed hope, let us hold fast the confidence of it with the tenacity inspired by the conviction of its truth, and the certainty that at the last, it will burst upon the world in glory, like the sun long hidden on a cloudy day.

Appearances And Realities, Husbands And Wives

The ephemerality of present life.—The appearance of things.—No apparent change.—An utter fallacy.—Visiting after twenty years.—Saddening, but instructive.—But one end in the natural order.—Not mawkishness to look at ; good sense.—Constitutional evil.—A streak of light and hope in human history.—“According to his abundant mercy.”—Something to rejoice in.—Cause for song.—Deliverance when Christ comes.—A perpetual fountain of living waters.—Madness to turn aside.—For whom awaits the glory.—Always an “if.”—Things specified.—How we ought to behave.—Husbands and wives.—Putting on of apparel.—Poor-minded women.—Wise and worthy women.—A wise man.—The husband “giving honour” to the wife.—Not laying down the law.—A mode of going to work that frustrates the end in view.—The part of a tyrant.—Mutual uncarefulness.—At first sight impossible.—The things seen, temporal.—The family relation ephemeral.—The sons of God.—The mustered family.—The feast of good things that waits.

SOMETIMES what we read—sometimes what we sing—furnishes the starting point of our meditations. This time, it is both. We have sung of the ephemerality of our present life ; we have read some cheering

things touching another life and of the conditions that lead from emancipation from one to the other. Let us grapple with both ideas for a few minutes. They need grappling with : we cannot otherwise grasp them to any practical purpose. Who estimates the vanity of human life as it ought to be estimated ? Their number is very few. The appearance of things is against such an estimate. They appear in the gross as if they were always the same. You go out into the streets and there are always babies, and school children, and young men, and middle-aged men, and old men. From year to year the picture is the same. There is no apparent change. Things appear fixed and stable, and people in general give in to the power of this appearance, and unconsciously form their purposes on this tacit but not-to-be-confessed assumption. It is well to take time occasionally to look behind this assumption and see its utter fallacy. Though the picture of human life is always the same in the mass, take it in the detail and you find a very different state of things. If you have it in your power, go to a place where you have not been for twenty years. Consider the people you were acquainted with before you left. Where are the babies you knew ? Nowhere. Most of them are in their graves : the rest are bustling young men and women. Where are the young men and women you knew ? You cannot find them. You may find sober middle-aged people on whom time is making its mark, and who show little of the blitheness of youth. Where are the middle-aged men ? They are dead or old. Where are the old men that interested you and were interested in you in your boyhood or girlhood ? They are gone. The grass grows on their graves in the cemetery. The picture saddens perhaps, but instructs. What has happened to our acquaintance is happening to us all. We are all —young and old—wise and foolish—rich and poor—in one procession—one long ceaseless procession to the grave. We know it in ourselves and in the friends of our bosom. As time goes on we change—slowly but surely. The light of the eye gets more subdued ; incipient wrinkles show themselves in the corners of the countenance ; the curve and plumpness of beauty give way to the angularity and attenuation of decay. Grey hairs show here and there. Follow the process long enough, and it has but one end in the natural order. The flame of the lamp burns low in its socket till, after a few unsteady twinkles, it goes out. The night comes when no man can work. The mourners go about the street.

It is not mawkishness that conjures such a picture ; it is good sense ; it is wisdom. Only folly ignores the dreadful inevitable to which all human life is at present subject. It drinks and forgets its sorrow. It revels and shouts and sinks deeper in the miserable mire. Rather let ours be the man of God's prayer, " So teach us to number our days *that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*" Rather let us obey the exhortation which speaketh unto us as unto children : " Redeem the time because the days are evil " : " Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." The exhortation is seated in wisdom. The days *are* evil. Nothing we can do can alter this fact. We may embellish the evil days and make them more comfortable ; but we cannot eradicate

SEASONS OF COMFORT

the constitutional evil in all human matters which leads every man at last to endorse Solomon's verdict, "Vanity and vexation of spirit."

Of course, if there were nothing else within reach, it would be un wisdom in the highest degree to trouble ourselves. To make the best of our evil days with as light a heart as possible, would be the most commendable course, though with our best endeavours, the attempt to realize good in evil must be a failure. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die," would at least be a natural motto in such a case. But this is not the state of the case. What means our meeting this morning? What mean these emblems on the table? There is a streak of light and hope in human history. We have another relative besides Adam. We have a redeeming as well as an enslaving kinsman. Our glorious Creator, as our reading informs us (1 Pet. 1), "hath begotten us again unto a *lively hope* by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." And this we are told is "according to his *abundant mercy*." Let us take comfort from this intimation. We all know what mercy is. It is the exhibition of kindness where it is not deserved. We all appreciate it keenly when it is shown towards ourselves, however we may at any time fail to conceive it towards others. It is not only mercy we have to contemplate in the case before us: it is "abundant mercy"—mercy that abounds: mercy that is large and liberal and overflowing. It is what Paul elsewhere describes as "the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:7). It is a something to open our souls to—to rejoice in, to take comfort from. The goodness of God is an inexhaustible fountain of consolation. It is manifest in many ways, but in nothing so much as in the fact that he hath "begotten us again unto a lively hope." It was "while we were yet sinners" that this arrangement was made. As yet, the arrangement is only a matter of apprehension by faith. When the thing itself comes, we shall realize how much cause there is for the song which ascribes "blessing and honour, and glory and thanksgiving" to the Creator of all things and the Saviour by Christ Jesus. Meanwhile, we take from it all that finite fainting human faculty can draw. It contains provision for all our need—healing for all our woes. Are we weak and imperfect, with souls cleaving to the dust? We shall attain to power of nature and knowledge and spiritual affinity akin with the angels. Do we groan within ourselves, joining even in Paul's lamentation, "Oh wretched man that I am!" We shall be delivered from this bondage of corruption, and exchange the spirit of earth-tending heaviness for the glad-some garment of praise in that emancipation from the mortal which is the highest promise and the strongest desire. Are we harassed and overborne with the difficulties and the complications and the vexations incident to the present form of human life on earth? There is peace and rest and tranquillity and joy in store when Christ comes to take his brethren to his bosom, overshadowing them with his love and harbouring them in his Father's house—the glorious kingdom of the age to come. Are we poor and despised and of no account among men? The day comes when the saints will realize in their exaltation the promise of the Spirit by Isaiah: "Ye shall eat the

riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves" (Isa. 61 : 6). Are we lonely and famished of spirit for want of the society of intelligence and nobility and worth? The day of the manifestation of the sons of God will introduce us to a multitude that no man can number of the choicest of mankind, made perfect in their glorification—men of clear eye, and quick intelligent interest, and strong faith, and devout adoration of God—men whom Jehovah Himself styles "my jewels" (Mal. 3 : 17). Such society will be a perpetual fountain of living waters in which we shall bathe and disport ourselves with joy unspeakable and full of glory. There is no good thing to be conceived or desired but what is contained in the hope laid up for us in heaven with Christ, who will bring it unto us at his glorious revelation (1 Pet. 1 : 13).

With such a "joy set before us," does it not become easy, when we realize it, to endure the evil of present experience, and to submit to the deprivation connected with the profession of our hope? There is but one answer. It would be madness to turn aside. There is but one wise course, and that is to take Paul's advice: "Cast not away your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward".

Just one glimpse at another aspect of the question. For whom awaits all this "glory to be revealed"? Is it for all? We have learnt the truth on this point very clearly. Peter, whose letter we are considering, puts the matter plainly by question: "If the righteous shall scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" The apostles always speak of salvation contingently. There is always an "if." The "if" is not put obscurely. "If ye do these things"—things specified. There are "things" which have to be done and attained, the doing of which constitutes the doers "obedient children" and heirs of the good things promised. There are many such "things." We shall look at one of them strongly presented in our reading this morning; the reciprocal duties of husbands and wives. The truth comes into our houses and tells us how we ought to behave there. It has to do not only with the nature of man and the purpose of God, but with the way husbands and wives carry themselves towards each other. This has a practical interest for us all. We are most of us husbands and wives here this morning. Let us hear what Peter has to say to us on the subject (1 Pet. 3 : 1). The wives then, in subjection to their own husbands, are to exhibit a "chaste conversation (or behaviour) coupled with fear" in illustration of the power of the word over them. This is the opposite of the brazen-faced self-assertion which finds favour in some quarters in our day. They are to commend themselves to their husbands by their attire, but not only their external attire. They are not to aim at effect in this department: "Whose adorning," says Peter, "let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel." This is a very cheap kind of ornamentation. Only poor-minded women would aim at distinction by its employment. Daughters of Sarah can afford to allow the other daughters to have a monopoly of finery. It can be purchased at so much a yard! Not so with the adorning that Peter recommends. "Let it be the hidden man

SEASONS OF COMFORT

of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even *the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit*, which is in the sight of God of great price." Wise and worthy women can afford to act on this exhortation. Woman is attractive enough in herself to make her independent of trinkets and ribbons, not that she is to go to the other extreme and be prudish and unsightly. There is a medium in all these things which good sense easily finds. Women of worth will be found on the medium line. The gew-gaws will certainly be left to the fools. It is the same among men. Where do you find dressiness, dandyism, foppery? Always among the empty heads—never among the wise and righteous. In fact it is almost a safe rule of calculation that in proportion to the amount of adornment outside is the want of adornment inside. Wives are to be modest, and discreet, and sober of character and attire.

Then the husbands have their part. They are to "dwell with the wives according to knowledge"—not according to ignorance: not according to unwisdom. A husband of the apostolic type is governed by intelligence in his ways. A wise man is a beauty anywhere, but especially by the side of a good wife. How is he to behave to her? There is something on this point. He is to "give honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life." There is a good deal implied in this. The wife is told to be subject to her husband: but the husband is not told to lecture her on her duty to be subject. He is told to "give honour" to her. This is the opposite of telling her she is subject. To tell her of her subjection is to cast dishonour upon her. To treat her as a subject is to make her a slave and not a co-heir of life eternal. Let a man do his part and a woman is very likely to do hers. Where is the woman that would not find it easy to be subject to a man who honoured her, "who nourished and cherished her, even as the Lord the church"? (Eph. 5:29). There may be women who even in such a case would be insubordinate and untractable: but they would be out of the common run. If a man, however, loves, nourishes and cherishes his wife, he will not be under much temptation to lay down the law to her on the subject of her subjection. In fact he could not do such a thing, for such a course would be inconsistent with the honour he gives her. If each side would preach and concern themselves with their own duty, each would find their own part easier. It is not for a husband to say to a wife, "It is your duty to obey me." It is not for a wife to say to a husband, "It is your duty to honour me." This mode of going to work would frustrate instead of forward the end in view. A wife is not likely to be the more obedient for being told it is her duty, but the reverse; and a husband's love is not likely to grow for being ordered. Rather let the wife say, "It is my duty to obey you"; and let the husband say, "It is my duty to honour you." Such an attitude, taken sincerely and naturally on each side, and carried out in a practical way, would be a powerful mutual help. The other way is a mutual hindrance and destruction. The right way is the attitude divinely enjoined, and it is the attitude taken by the children of God. Those who act otherwise are not "obedient children." A man knowing the gospel and able to talk of it, but acting the part of a tyrant at

home, is no brother of Christ, however he may pass current among men. He is what Paul calls "sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." So a woman having understanding of the ways of God, but acting an insubordinate unloving part in private, is no member of the sisterhood of Christ, however distinctly and decidedly she may be recognized as "a sister" among professors of the truth. These things concern the spirit of Christ, and "if any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

It wants just one other element thrown in to complete the picture of the conjugal relation as scripturally defined—an element apparently incompatible with the mutual concern just considered—yet not at all so. It is the element of a certain sort of mutual uncarefulness, that referred to by Paul when he says, "But this I say, brethren, the time is short : it remaineth that both they that have wives *be as though they had none*" (1 Cor. 7 : 29) : alluded to also by Jesus when he says "If a man come to me, and hate not . . . his wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." It seems at first sight impossible to reconcile this with the love that a man is enjoined to bestow on wife and children. It is one of those sayings that are apt to make a man feel as certain disciples felt who left Christ, saying of another matter, "This is an hard saying : who can hear it ?" Persistent dwelling in the word will open this as well as other dark matters. The allusion to a man's "own life" shows the sense of Christ's words. A man is not to value any human thing on a level with the things appertaining to Christ. The things that are seen are all temporal—short-lived and inferior : the things of Christ, not yet seen, are all eternal and lofty and glorious. Christ asks us to hate the one by comparison with the other. He asks us to put him first—before wife and child and life. This is reasonable. The family relation is ephemeral, an adaptation to the needs of a transitory phase of the world's history. Enlightened husbands and wives will recognize this, and while loving each other as is meet they will each give to Christ the higher place.

Finally, says Peter, going outside of the domestic circle, "Be ye *all* of one mind, having compassion one of another ; love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous : not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing ; but contrariwise blessing." The sons of God answer to this character. Unity, compassion, love, prevail among them—even now. Where contrary conditions exist, it is because of the presence of a foreign element. There will be no foreign element in the perfected body of Christ. The mustered family will be perfect and entire, lacking nothing. A powerful mutual affection, on the basis of mutual and unblemished excellence, and nurtured by the unailing strength of the spiritual and immortal nature, will provide a chief and glorious feature in the feast of good things to come that awaits the accepted brethren of the Lord Jesus.

Paul's Sorrow About Israel

Paul's sorrow for the estrangement of his kinsmen.—A national estrangement.—Remembering his own situation.—A repetition of the experience of all the prophets.—Our position somewhat similar.—Christendom unbelieving.—A grievous discovery.—Accept our mournful lot.—“For Thy sake I have suffered rebuke.”—A dreary position.—Does not last long.—Days few.—An objection unexpressed.—Something at first sight obscure.—Not all Israel that are of Israel.—The solution.—“Princes with God.”—Not sufficient to belong to Israel.—Abraham's children.—Israel by adoption.—Our adoption not irrevocable.—Standing by faith.—Some people imagine salvation sure.—In Isaac the seed be called.—Descendants of Isaac.—Ishmael.—Paul's argument right.—Mechanical generation not a suitable foundation for a work of God for His own glory.—Isaac a child of Jehovah's own promise and production.—The Jews the natural root of the spiritual flower.—Faith and obedience.—The Gentiles.—Adoption.—Apart from it, all barbarism and death.

THERE are various matters in the chapter read (Rom. 9) which may profitably engage our contemplations this morning. First we have Paul telling us that he had “great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart.” The cause of this sorrow may afford us comfort in a certain way, for we are in some points in a similar relation. The cause of his sorrow was the estrangement from Christ of his “kinsmen according to the flesh, Israelites, to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.” To see the full cause of this sorrow, we must recognize the fulness of its extent. The estrangement of Israel from Christ was a national estrangement. It comprehended the vast mass of the nation. There were many thousands of Jews who believed, but these were but a handful among the others. The picture before the mind of Paul was the picture of God's nation as a whole in a state of non-submission to God's will concerning them; yea, a state of virulent opposition to what He required of them, and that too in the guise of a national zeal for what God had revealed by Moses—a guise that in many cases corresponded with their sincere sentiments, as Paul testifies, “I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge” (Rom. 10 : 2). He could remember his own situation in a similar predicament, which enabled him the more easily to recognize their case and the more deeply to sorrow for it. As he said to the crowd whom he was permitted to address on the occasion of his arrest in Jerusalem, “I was zealous towards God, *as ye all are this day* : and I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both and men women” (Acts 22 : 3-4).

Here was Paul's sorrow, that the one nation upon earth which was divine—divine in its origin, in its history, in its relations, in its institutions, should be out of harmony with its own glorious privileges ;

should be blind to its own glorious Scriptures ; should have rejected its own glorious Messiah, and spurned its own glorious hope, as taught by his apostles. Nothing was to be expected from classical Greek, or pagan Roman, or the untutored barbarian races : but Israel—God's witnesses in the earth to whom pertained the promises and the covenants, and who professed subjection to the writings of Moses and the prophets ! Paul deeply sorrowed and had continual heaviness of heart, that while they made their boast of God and Moses, they knew not the scriptures of Moses, which required them to hearken to the promised prophet like unto Moses, who had been raised up in their midst by the Lord who delivered them from the land of Egypt.

While we look at burdened and groaning Paul in this relation, we are reminded that it is only a repetition of the experience of all the prophets. They were much alone in their day and generation and from the same cause, that the bulk of God's own nation were out of harmony with the foundation upon which they were professedly founded. It is easy to see how we may apply their cases to our own comfort. Our position is somewhat similar. We live in the midst of a community professedly subject to Christ, boasting of his name, and doing many great things in connection with their profession, and yet as a matter of fact, they are unbelieving of the great truth of which Jesus was the embodiment, and disobedient to nearly all the commandments he has delivered. We find this out by the test we are commanded to apply—the test of the law and the testimony applied to their works and principles—a process of test which Jesus commended in the Ephesians (Rev. 2 : 2). The discovery that this is the state of things is very grievous. It is wholesome as regards ourselves, but sorrow-causing—a discovery causing isolation, cutting us off from the surrounding streams of sympathy, and subjecting us to a soul-parching experience and imparting “great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart.” What can we do? We can only accept our mournful lot in hope of the better day, when whole nations will seek to learn Jehovah's ways and to walk in His paths. It would be the act of insanity to do otherwise. We must not let the situation have the effect of making us join the universal departure from God. It is our wisdom to act in the way enjoined on the prophets and apostles : “Let them return unto thee, but return not thou unto them.” Jeremiah declares his action to have been in harmony with this advice : “I sat not in the assembly of the mockers, nor rejoiced : I sat alone, because of thy hand.” Again : “For thy sake I have suffered rebuke. Thy words were found, and I did eat them ; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart.” Paul exemplified the same course of action, and recommended the brethren to adopt the same, even towards men professing to be brethren, who opposed the truth, or set at naught the commandments.

It is a dreary position, but let us not faint. It is part of the situation as appointed. All the promises, as you know, are for those who mourn, who are poor, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and who are spoken evil of because of their zeal for what is right

before God. We all desire to participate in the consolation of the day of the manifestation of the sons of God. Consequently we must be prepared to accept the dark side for the present. All the sons of God have had to do it in their day and generation. It is true of them all, that "through much tribulation they enter into the kingdom of God." It is grievous while it lasts, but does not last long at the longest. Our days are few if evil, and the days of the recompense are endless and fraught with goodness such as it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."

Reverting to the unhappy state of things in Israel Paul anticipates and answers a criticism that he does not formulate, but which is manifestly present to his mind and to which the position he takes up is naturally open. This is a very frequent thing in Paul's letters, where an objection, not expressed, yet visible between the lines, is dealt with where it would naturally arise. The objection in the present case relates to the apparent complete failure confessed, in God's dealings with Israel. It is as if the objector said, "How is it that the word of God has had so little effect that the very nation whom He has made the special subject of treatment is in nearly complete rebellion against Him? There must be something wrong." Paul in effect replies, "Not so: do not judge so harshly; God's purpose has not failed at all, although I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart." His words are, "Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel which are of Israel: neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called."

Here is something at first sight very obscure. We do not at first see in what way it is an answer to the objection with which Paul is dealing. But let us ponder it a little, and we shall see its completeness as an answer shine out with brightness. The first difficulty is in the statement, "They are not all Israel that are of Israel." At first sight it would seem as if to be Israel and "of Israel" were the same thing: for as we look at Israel in the earth, it seems natural to ask, Who are Israel if not those who appertain to Israel? The solution is in the use of the term Israel. There are two ways of using this term; first, in the sense in which it originated in the history of Jacob at the very beginning, and secondly, in the sense of designating the descendants of Jacob as a race in the earth. Now, it is obviously more appropriate every way to use the term with the meaning in which it originated, for this defines its exact relations. Its meaning is "a prince with God." It was because of this meaning that it was bestowed on Jacob, who prevailed by his spiritual importunity on the occasion of a certain angel appearing to him. With this meaning it has come to embrace the whole family of God, retrospectively and prospectively. Now, why were Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets, esteemed as "princes with God"? Was it because of their extraction or because of their character? The latter unquestionably. God made choice of them on this ground. "I know him (Abraham), that he will command his children and

his household after him, and *they shall keep the way of the Lord*, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18 : 19). God chose their descendants as a nation, on the basis of the covenant of circumcision (17 : 10-14); and as a nation they will remain His as unalterably as the establishment of the ordinances of heaven and earth (Jer. 31 : 36, 37). But a man may belong to the nation and pass away as an individual, like Achan, or Judas, or the whole generation whose carcasses fell in the wilderness because of their insubordination. He may be born of Israel and thus be of Israel and yet not be Israel in the original significance of the term. It is not sufficient for individual participation in the glorious *aion* of perfection in reserve for Israel, that a man belong to the nation of Israel. He must be Israel as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were Israel—a prince with God because of faith and obedience. Now this was the case with only a small minority in Israel: hence it came to pass that they were not all Israel that were of Israel. It did not follow because they were the seed of Abraham according to the flesh that therefore they were all "children." To be children in the complete sense, they required to resemble Abraham in his faith and in the docility of his obedience to God. So Jesus had told them, before Paul by the Spirit wrote similar words: "I know that ye are Abraham's seed: but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you . . . If ye were Abraham's children, *ye would do the works of Abraham*" (John 8 : 37-39). Paul's meaning is therefore perfectly clear. The word of God had not been without effect. It had accomplished its work with Israel in all generations: and if it did not leaven the whole body of the nation, it was because "they were not all Israel that were of Israel." They were not of the right stamp; they were not all of a good and honest heart (Matt. 13 : 23; Luke 8 : 15). Moses recognized this even before they entered the land (Deut. 31 : 29; 32 : 5). If it be asked why they were not all of the good and honest heart, that opens out a question which Paul deals with further on in the same chapter.

Meanwhile, let us deal with the principle before us as it bears upon ourselves; for we handle these matters in vain if we do not extract from them something of an improving and purifying effect. You may say, How can it be made to bear upon us, seeing we are not Israel after the flesh? The answer is, though we are not of Israel after the flesh, we are Israel by adoption, as Paul teaches, styling the adopted in Christ "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6 : 16), and plainly teaching that such are no longer strangers but fellow-citizens in the commonwealth of Israel (Eph. 2 : 19). Now, is our adoption irrevocable? Does it follow that we shall always be Israel because we have been adopted? On this point Paul is very explicit. Using the figure of the olive tree to represent the commonwealth of Israel, and its natural branches, as the Jews, he says, "Because of unbelief they were broken off, and *thou standest by faith*. Be not high-minded, but fear: for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee. . . . Continue in his goodness; otherwise

SEASONS OF COMFORT

thou shalt also be cut off" (Rom. 11 : 20-22). From this it is evident that we stand related to precisely the same principles of standing as those which governed God's dealings with Israel after the flesh. What follows? That it may be true of us as of them: "They are not all Israel that are of Israel." You may say why put such an idea forward? Merely because of the great importance of its recognition. Some people are apt to imagine that it is all right with them because they have been baptized upon a profession of the truth—that because they are associated with the brethren, their salvation is sure; that because they assemble with the brethren and are of the brethren and so recognized, therefore they are brethren. It is well to see that they are not all Israel that are of Israel; that they are not all brethren that are of the brethren: and that if a man have not a loving and a fearing heart towards Him, and a zealous affection for the things of the Spirit, and a readiness for prompt obedience of the commandments, his standing among the brethren will weigh nothing in his favour when the day comes for the selection and manifestation of the princes of God in all the earth. The choice will only fall on "Israelites indeed": mere Israelites can have no useful place in the house of God, which is the house of His glory and the house of holiness.

Paul's quotation of what was said concerning Isaac is a similar example of a truth having two applications easily made to appear inconsistent one with another. He proves his assertion that the mere seed of Abraham after the flesh are not necessarily his children, by the words addressed to Abraham when he was distressed about sending Ishmael away: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." This might be thought a strange way of disproving the standing of those who were actually descendants of Isaac. It would seem to have the opposite effect, for if in Isaac, as contrasted with Ishmael, the seed were to be called, surely the Jews had a right in claiming sonship as the descendants of Isaac. Go deeper, however, and we find Paul's argument right. Why in Isaac and not in Ishmael were Abraham's seed to be called? For a reason which when applied to the subject of Paul's contention, established his argument that all were not Israel who were of Israel. This reason as defined by Paul is in Rom. 9 : 8, as follows: "They who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed." Ishmael as the mere offspring of the mechanical law of generation was not a suitable foundation for a work of God in the earth which was to be His own direct work and for His own glory, exclusive of all ground for human complacency. The foundation of this work was to be a son, which had to be given outside the power of nature. Such a son was Isaac. Concerning his maternity, we read: "Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child *when she was past age*, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude." This fact in Abraham's history was a distinct enunciation of the principle that Paul was contending for. Ishmael was the seed of Abraham according to the flesh, yet he was excluded from

the covenant, because no more than this. Isaac was a child of Jehovah's own promise and production, and was of Abraham's character in addition to Abraham's blood. Surely nothing could be more logical than Paul's deduction from this, that they who are the children of the flesh are not the children of God : but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. If it be contended that this excludes the Jews from divine relation altogether the answer is No ; God has chosen them as a nation. This is the natural root out of which the spiritual flower is grown : first the natural, afterwards the spiritual. It was needful there should be a nation as the foundation. This nation was chosen " in Isaac," that is, his descendants in Jacob were chosen nationally on the basis of flesh extraction, but a step higher in the same process was necessary to give an individual place with Isaac in the perfect state contemplated in the promises in their ultimate fulfilment. Faith and obedience were needful in the individual members of Isaac's race in order to their being " counted for the seed " in its final form. If it be asked, what, then, about the Gentiles ? the answer is that we get by adoption what the Jews get by birth, and we are no more exempt than they from the necessity of building on the foundation of our adoption that spiritual structure of faith and obedience which they were required to add to their natural extraction from the holders of the promises. Such, whether Jews or Gentiles, are the children of promise as Isaac was—the children contemplated in the promises to the fathers, and the children produced by God's own operation among men : for where would they have been apart from the fact stated by James, " Of his own will begat he us by the word of truth" ? He has placed the truth in the world with this mission. It is his power unto salvation to everyone believing. Apart from it, all is barbarism and death, albeit the barbarism may be very elegant, and death decked out in a beautiful wreathing of false immortelles.

Election Versus Calvinism

The ninth chapter of Romans full of important instruction in the ways of God.—The final inheritance not on the mere hereditary principle.—An excellent “way.”—Infinitely superior to the human system of things.—Not only legal title but the highest moral qualification.—How glorious the result!—The purpose of God according to election.—Far from giving countenance to Calvinistic ideas.—God’s family an affair of divine purpose.—A purpose based upon certain principles of choice.—Calvinism ignores the principles which regulate the choice.—The purpose in harmony with moral fitness.—Vain to go behind the beginning of matters.—Grant the potter and the clay, an end to all controversy.—The final challenge of the objector.—Paul’s rejoinder.—God constitutes men and creates circumstances for the accomplishment of His purpose.—Vessels of mercy.—His mercy not capriciously bestowed.—Vessels of mercy “afore prepared unto glory.”—At first none but the Jews only.—At last the Gentiles also.—Calvinistic views.—Maundering torment.—“The elect.”—Unscripturalness of such a view.—Examining their own selves.—The characteristics of the appointed inheritors.—Rich in faith.—Rich in this world.—Righteous.—Diligent followers of every good work.—Forsake not the assembling.—Pray always.—Zealous of good works.—Followers of Paul.—“Such a standard excludes hope.”—No; vessels of mercy after all.—Forgiveness conditional.—The apparently conflicting doctrines of personal righteousness and forgiveness.—Rejoice and be glad.

HAVING on the last occasion left unfinished the consideration of the ninth chapter of Romans, we cannot perhaps do better than return to it before dealing with any fresh topic. It is a chapter full of important instruction in the ways of God—ways which, as Jehovah Himself tells us by Isaiah, are as much higher than our ways as heaven is higher than the earth: ways therefore which fail to engage the sympathies of the purely natural mind, but which, nevertheless, are more beautiful and ennobling and ultimately beneficial than all the best ways of man.

One of such ways we have already seen—that the seed or family for which He purposes the final inheritance of the earth in an immortal state, are not developed on the mere hereditary principle. They are not to come into Abraham’s inheritance merely because they have Abraham’s blood in their veins, but because, being Abraham’s children by descent or adoption, they are also characterized by that faith and docility with which in Abraham God was well pleased, and which he counted unto him for righteousness. We must on reflection be able very heartily to pronounce this an excellent “way.” How infinitely superior to the principle which regulates the succession of property—ay, of crowns and sceptres—in the human system of things. A man is heir to a certain estate or a certain throne merely because he is of a certain parentage. It matters not how

unfitted he may be for the position. He may be a bad man, an imbecile, or a tyrant : he is secured all the same in the full enjoyment of his rights and possessions. The consequence may be seen in the wretched condition of things upon earth.

But the " heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ," to whom the future in all the earth belongs, are men not only of legal title but of the highest moral qualification. The legal title is in fact made to hang on the moral qualification ; for the legal title will be quashed if the other is defective. Their status depends not on their extraction but on their fitness for the privileges of the extraction. The children of promise only are counted for the seed. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. If any man have not the faith and character of Abraham, he is not his seed and heir according to the promise, even if he have the blood of Abraham or the highest title which adoption can give. He must " do the works of Abraham " (John 8 : 39).

How glorious will be the result of the application of this rule ! Every member of the developed family, when Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, will appear in the kingdom of God, will be a tried and true man, not only holding, in the grace of God, a true title to his position as a noble in the future age, but possessing those moral characteristics which will make him a blessing to all in subjection to him, a constant sweetness to all his glorious equals, a joy to Christ, and a glory to God.

You say, " What ? will they not be forgiven men, and therefore men who in their day have erred and come short ? " Yes, yes : " there liveth not a man that sinneth not " (1 Kings 8 : 46 ; Eccl. 7 : 20). " It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed " (Lam. 3 : 22). But then, realize this : only certain are forgiven. The question is, who ? The answer in all the Scriptures is, " Those who confess their sins and forsake them," " those who are of broken and contrite heart," " those who forgive others," and who, having been forgiven much, love much, and labour much in the Lord and for the Lord. These do the works of Abraham—works of faith and obedience : these have the spirit of Christ. They are a great contrast to the withered branches who bring forth no fruit : who are in the lukewarm state which the Lord hates.

But not only are the children of the promise, in preference to the children of the flesh, counted for the seed : we have to look at another of the ways of God in the statement of Paul, that the working out of the plan was so arranged " that the purpose of God according to election might stand." Rebecca was told before the birth of Jacob and Esau, that the elder should serve the younger. Paul deals with this as if it were an arbitrary selection ; and answers the objection on this ground. He as much as says, " Granting that God chose one before another of His own prerogative, is there unrighteousness with God in this ? " (verse 14). Has He not a right to do as He will with His own ? " Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour, if it so please him ? " He quotes Jehovah's declaration to

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion," from which he deduces the conclusion, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy."

Now, all this is very important and very reasonable, but it is far from giving countenance to Calvinistic ideas of election. It is the importation of Calvinistic ideas that makes the argument obscure or the chapter difficult. The idea before Paul's mind is only properly to be seen side by side with that which he was opposing. It is a very simple one : that the development of God's family upon earth is an affair of *divine purpose* upon divine principles of selection, and not a matter of human plan or human working out at all. Both the Jews and Greeks assigned to man a large part in their respective conceptions of the working out of futurity. Human merit according to the Greeks, human pedigree according to the Jews, had all to do in determining the evolution of spiritual destinies. Paul's argument is that it is an affair of divine pre-conceived purpose altogether ; apart from which, man could have done absolutely nothing ; and that the purpose is according to election or choice, that is, a purpose based upon certain principles of choice. Where Calvinism is wrong is that it ignores *the principles which regulate the choice*. It makes it purely an exercise of "sovereign will," which it truly is in the sense of being unconstrained and irresponsible authority ; but it fails to take into account what God has revealed concerning the way He exercises His election, selection, or choice. The cases of Jacob and Esau, and Pharaoh cited by Paul, illustrate the point. They were all the result of a divine purpose : but the purpose was formed in harmony with moral fitness. If Esau's rejection was proclaimed beforehand, it must be noticed that Esau turned out a wild man and a lover of sport—a thing known in advance to Him to whom "all his works are known from the beginning." If Pharaoh was raised up and hardened that God's power might be exhibited, it must be recognized that Pharaoh was a fit subject for such a use. He was not a humble-minded, reasonable, obedient man, but a man of self-sufficient and wilful heart, and all was known to God beforehand. If a believing, obedient Jacob had been treated as an Esau ; if an Abraham had been dealt with as a Pharaoh, we should then have had the confounding proposition of Calvin illustrated. We should not have had a "purpose of God according to election," but a purpose "*not according to election*" : for no principle of selection would have been visible in such a procedure. If it be asked, "Were not these men—Esau and Pharaoh—what they were as the result of the divine purpose beforehand ?" the answer is, that it is vain to go behind the beginning of matters in that way. We can only deal with things as they are. It is vain to trouble ourselves with the inscrutable causes. It is a matter of some concern and some advantage to see that the works of God when accomplished are developed in harmony with the principles which He has declared to regulate His acts. If it be said that this is not facing but shirking the difficulty involved in the idea of a divine purpose, we can only take final refuge in Paul's question,

“Hath not the potter power over the clay, to work it into any shape he pleases?” Grant the potter and the clay, and there is an end to all controversy. The point to see clearly is that vessels, when the potter has made them, are not put by him to a use inconsistent with their nature, but in harmony with it.

“Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?” Thus incisively does Paul state the final challenge of the objector. It appears unanswerable like many other sallies of sophistry. It fails through not recognizing that the working out of God’s purposes with persons leaves room for the exercise of human will as well, and that in this margin of individual volition, it is not unreasonable that God should distribute praise or blame as the case may call for. There is much presumption in the objections brought forward on this subject, which are best met by Paul’s rejoinder, “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? . . . What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long suffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles?” What answer can there be to this? Only one that is truly reasonable: If God, willing to manifest the attributes of His character for human acquaintance, chose to constitute men and create circumstances for the effectual accomplishment of that purpose, there is not only no room for cavil, but occasion for highest gratitude and praise. The Possessor of heaven and earth can do as He pleases, without rightful challenge from any of the souls He has made; and when what He pleases to do, as a whole, is so wise and good and glorious, it is the part of the creatures of His hand to stand still and adore.

This will certainly be the attitude of those whom Paul styles “vessels of mercy.” Who those are we may easily learn. Vessels of mercy are those to whom mercy is shown. This mercy is a sparing and a favouring where no right to such exists. This will be done to those who take a reasonable attitude. Though God says, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,” He does not mean that His mercy is capriciously bestowed. It is bestowed on very well defined principles. “His mercy is towards them that fear him.” “To the merciful man, thou wilt show thyself merciful.” “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” Such are the plain declarations of the word, illustrated and confirmed by the statement of Jesus that “if we from the heart forgive not every man his brother his trespasses, neither will the Father forgive our trespasses.” The mercy of God will be shown towards those who take a reverent and docile attitude towards Him, and a merciful attitude towards men. Such are “vessels of mercy,” filled with the mercy of God and overflowing with it towards others. Such only are the children of God.

They are "not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles." For a long time they were "of the Jews only," and only a very small remnant of them. As the eye travels backwards, it picks out the Nehemiahs, and the Daniels and the Jeremiahs, and the Davids and the Samuels, and the Joshuas and the Moses and the Josephs, and by the eye of a legitimate imagination, it sees clustered round those illustrious names, like the seven thousand in Elijah's day, many unnamed and to men unknown children of faith and righteousness, vessels of mercy "afore prepared unto glory." Still, in proportion to the mass of Israel, they were few and unimportant, and outside Israel, they were not to be found, for "the sons of the strangers," joining themselves to Israel, became Israel. In the apostolic age, even after Christ's ascension, the disciples, as we know, "preached unto none but unto the Jews only." But the day came when "unto the Gentiles also was granted repentance unto life." In the work of extending this privilege, Paul, as we know, performed a prominent—in fact the leading part, so much so as to be called "the apostle of the Gentiles." In this work we have come to be included through those ways of Providence which have brought us into contact with the testimony; and it is our duty and our wisdom to realize what this means with regard to our position and relation to God and man. Are we vessels of mercy prepared afore unto glory? Some say "That is just what we would like to know." They are apt to take a Calvinistic view of the situation and to embarrass themselves with that maudering torment which in past times has sent some people to the asylum: the torment of arguing that if they are not among "the elect" it is no use trying, and that if they are, it is superfluous. The unscripturalness of such a view must be evident at once from the constant vein of entreaty and exhortation that runs through the epistles, impressing on the believers the necessity of taking heed "lest" they should come short of the promised inheritance (Heb. 4 : 1). The purpose of God in the matter—even as in the case of Jacob and Esau—is not arbitrary but "according to election," and the election is "according to fitness," and fitness is according to the earnest endeavour of good and honest hearts to "make their calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1 : 10). Therefore those may know themselves "vessels of mercy prepared afore unto glory," who, examining their own selves, as Paul advises, find themselves answer to the characteristics of those who are declared the appointed inheritors of the kingdom and glory of God. Are they "poor in this world, *rich in faith*"? (Jas. 2 : 5). So far they answer to the right description. Are they rich in this world? Well, their case is not hopeless but it is difficult. It is Jesus who says so (Matt. 19 : 23), and it is not for us to cloak his words. Paul recognizes their case as hopeful but calling for special vigilance (1 Tim. 6 : 17-19). Jesus also (Luke 16 : 9). If they are rich in faith and good works, their worldly riches will no more work against them than the riches of Abraham. But "rich in this world and poor in faith" is a bad case. "Poor in this world and poor in faith" is worse. Rich in this world and rich in faith is beautiful, but the prevalent apostolic type is defined in James's

words, "poor in this world, rich in faith." Well then, are they righteous in their lives? Another mark in their favour. "The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6 : 9). Even "the righteous shall scarcely be saved" (1 Pet. 4 : 18). The habitually disobedient and unrighteous are without hope except they repent. Then, are they diligent followers of every good work? (1 Tim. 5 : 10). Do they forsake not the assembling of themselves with the saints? (Heb. 10 : 25). Do they pray always (Luke 18 : 1), and in everything give thanks in the name of the Lord Jesus? (Eph. 5 : 20). Are they "peculiar" and zealous of good works? (Titus 2 : 14). Are they, in a word, followers of Paul, even as he was of Christ? (1 Cor. 11 : 1). If so, they need not distress themselves about the abstract question of whether they are included among "the elect"; for the elect are made up of such as they, and because they are such, and of none else; and "all" and "whosoever" that are of that stamp will be included.

It may be said that such a standard excludes hope. It would do so if there was no provision for shortcoming. But these "vessels of mercy" have to remember that they are vessels of *mercy* after all, and that after all they can do, it is of the Lord's favour that they are chosen unto glory. If their faults were not overlooked, they could not be saved. David gives expression to the idea when he says, "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, who should stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared" (Psa. 130 : 3). The multitude of the redeemed is a multitude who rejoicingly acknowledge in the day of their glory that they have been "washed from their sins in the blood of the Lamb"—sins not only pre-baptismal, but after adoption, as in the case of Peter. Consequently, we must not despond in our weakness, but lift up the hands that hang down, and confirm the feeble knees, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way, but rather let it be healed (Heb. 12 : 12, 13).

It may be said again that this doctrine of forgiveness neutralizes the doctrine of moral excellence being necessary to inclusion among "the elect." It may be asked, where the need of righteousness if forgiveness rehabilitates the sinner? The question overlooks the fact that forgiveness itself is conditional. For example, Jesus teaches that a man who is not forgiving will not be forgiven (Matt. 18 : 35). There are other qualities requisite for the obtainment of forgiveness. Only those who fear God and have a tender heart towards His covenants and His ways—who love Him and hope in His mercy, and are striving earnestly to walk acceptably before Him, will receive the great benefit of forgiveness for Christ's sake. Only for such will He intercede; and if He intercede not, a man has no hope. There is a great difference between men of the loving, striving, earnest type and those who are callous and lukewarm. The shortcomings of the former—confessed and repented and prayed for, will be overlooked, where the debts of the indifferent and unmerciful will be exacted to the "uttermost farthing." Thus the apparently conflicting doctrines of personal righteousness and forgiveness meet in

harmony, each coming up to the boundary line where they meet and fuse in a beautiful blending of colour.

Let us rejoice and be glad at the position we have attained in the matter in contrast with Israel after the flesh. It remains true as Paul says in this chapter, that "the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness." We were all of us Gentiles following not righteousness, but the passing gratification of an unenlightened mind. In the purpose of God according to election, we have been called to be "vessels of mercy." Let us use every endeavour to make our calling and election sure.

God's Object In Restoring Israel

"Salvation is of the Jews."—Repugnant to many people.—Jewish affair too narrow.—Want something larger.—Make great mistake.—No salvation apart from the Jews.—The young man.—Give him time enough.—Elbowed out of the race.—Altogether vanity.—No promise except in Christ.—A Jew.—A work by and in the midst of the Jews.—The Christ of the Bible not Christ of popular religion.—The seed of Abraham, the Son of David, the King of Israel.—An address to "the mountains of Israel."—Interesting account of the purpose God has.—Greatly honoured in the past.—Much more honoured in the future.—The mountains of Israel have seen Christ.—They will look upon him again.—See with Bible eyes.—Abraham.—The land of promise.—The appointed centre for the divine glory.—Taken up in the lips of talkers.—The sneer of the common run.—Our answer.—We believe.—What God has to say to the mountains of Israel.—The present situation.—Israel's troubles the result of Israel's sins.—One reason of their restoration.—God's honour.—A certain amount of moral confusion.—No room for discomfort.—The nation humbled and reformed.—Pastors according to God's own heart.—The twelve disciples.—The outpouring of the Spirit of God on all flesh.—The incorrigible weeded out.—Why the subject is so distasteful to the common run of people.—The "theological ingredient."—The prejudice of barbarism.—The only stable element.—Shifting shadows on the ocean.—The only rational solution.—The universal mystery.—No longer interested in an ethnological point of view.—Transient appearances.—The Jews as a race.—Their futurity.—Dear to the hearts of all Jehovah's children.—Jehovah's jealousy.—The ascendancy of eternal and beneficial truth.—Man's highest interests.—His long promised kingdom.—Rejoice in the prospect.

"SALVATION is of the Jews": the statement is Christ's own, to the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob while he rested there, weary with his journey. It affirms a fact that is repugnant to many

people, yet most true and beautiful in itself. Even some people who love the truth when they hear it, but give it not afterwards the thoroughness of attention which is requisite to enable them to apprehend the strength of the foundation on which it stands, grow weary of this aspect of the matter. They say, "The Jewish affair is altogether too narrow an affair for us. The Jews are a small people in every sense: their land is a little country: their religion is exclusive and bigoted. We want something larger: something nobler, something more in harmony with the general sympathies of mankind." And so they turn for relief to the various schemes and arrangements which the Gentiles have devised for their entertainment and benefit. They make a great mistake, as they will find out sooner or later. Give them time enough, and they will see things as they are, assuming they possess the necessary capacity for discernment. They will find out there is no salvation apart from the Jews. There is no hope in natural life. "Every man walketh in a vain show. Surely they are disquieted in vain." "Every man at his best state is altogether vanity." This is David's testimony (Psa. 39), and those who turn from the hope of Israel will find it is a true one. There is no promise in natural directions except such as are destined to be broken. The young man steps upon the scene with much promise in his own eyes and the eyes of spectators: healthful and graceful and strong, and gifted and ardent—(let him also have plenty in his hands)—he thinks himself an exception to the vanity of which perchance he has heard much. He thinks the vanity a fact as regards the past and the old people around him: he thinks it in some way due to a want of enlightened views and wise practical application of scientific principles: in his own case, he is persuaded, as he hurries with buoyant step and bounding spirit along the bustling highway of active life, that he will be able to extract a different result from what appear to him the noble energies of life and the lofty aspirations of "heaven-born humanity." Ah! give him time enough. Give him sixty years more. Follow him, and ask, "Where is he now?" Perhaps he is still in the land of the living. He has not yet descended to the silent abode of past generations. Let us have a look at him. There he is crouching by a fireside corner, a shivering old man, elbowed out of the race by the rising generation, who are kind to him perhaps, but patronizingly kind, and only waiting to see him, with relief, breathe his last breath, and take his place among the countless myriads who have lived and died before him. He lingers a little: but at last the day comes, and the grave closes over him, and how soon his name is forgotten. "Surely every man at his best state is altogether vanity."

There is no promise except in Christ. In him there is joyful hope of good things to come—every good that can be conceived by the heart of man, and good that cannot be conceived. But who is he? It was he who said, "Salvation is of the Jews." You cannot have him apart from his word. In having him you have a Jew. You cannot isolate him from his surroundings. You cannot have him apart from what he is. He is a part of a system of God's work upon earth, albeit he is God in that work. It is a work by and in the midst of the Jews.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Jewish history is the history of that work. Christ is the terminal point of that history, the culmination of the work, the flower and fruit of the Israelitish tree. The Christ of the Bible is not the Christ of popular religion. The Christ of popular religion has no Jewish association or connection. Of course they know that historically he appeared among the Jews ; but in their view of him, he might as well have been born among the Chinese or the Ancient Britons. The Christ of the Bible is the seed of Abraham, the son of David, the King of Israel, as well as the Son of God. To him give all the prophets witness. We have had a reading from the prophets this morning (Ezekiel 36), and we shall find, although it mentions him not by name, it brings him before us in portraying to us that "restitution of all things" to which his coming stands related, and of which Peter said God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began (Acts 3 : 21). Let us look at it.

It is an address to "the mountains of Israel"—the hills and valleys of the Holy Land in desolation. This at once marks it off from all connection with popular religion, which has nothing to do with the mountains of Israel. Popular religionists may be interested in the mountains of Israel in an antiquarian way : association with Bible history imparts attraction to these places in the eyes of a few : but practically, they feel no connection. The mountains of Israel are in no way identified with their expectations and hopes. It is different in the truth. The mountains of Israel have a living interest in connection with futurity. They are interesting on account of what has already taken place there, but much more interesting on account of the purpose God has conceived "according to the good pleasure of his will," in relation to the beautiful earth we inhabit ; beautiful, yet gloomy and afflicted in many ways ; of which purpose the land of the mountains of Israel in the geographical sense is the basis. The mountains of Israel have been greatly honoured in the past as the scene of Jehovah's communications with the earth : they are to be much more honoured in the future in the display of His visible might thereon in the overthrow of the assembled hosts of the nations, and the establishment of an actual visible government that shall bless all the world with the arrangements necessary to secure glory to God and on earth peace. The mountains of Israel have seen Christ in their midst : they will look upon him again. He ascended from the Mount of Olives : and at his return "his feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives" (Zech. 14 : 4).

Our friends say, "What have you to do with the mountains of Israel? You belong to Birmingham. Let the mountains of Israel alone. They are all very well in their place ; but that place is not the place you give them. Palestine is a poor place, and the 'mountains of Israel' as you call them, only mounds of rubbish—interesting rubbish perhaps, in a way, but rubbish." If our friends could see with Bible eyes they would not talk in this strain. To see with Bible eyes is to see things in the light of what God intends as disclosed in the Bible. What He intends in this matter is very clearly and very early and afterwards very frequently made known. It lies at the root

GOD'S OBJECT IN RESTORING ISRAEL

of matters. It is found at the beginning. Abraham, to whom the promises were made (Gal. 3 : 16 ; Heb. 7 : 6), was called in his day to go to this very place : not for a then present purpose, except as regarded his own proof, for " he received none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on." He sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country (Heb. 11 : 9). He was afterwards to receive it for inheritance (verse 8), but he saw the fulfilment " afar off," and confessed that meanwhile he was a " stranger and a pilgrim " (verse 13). The everlasting inheritance of a land which is the glory of all lands, which is the object of Jehovah's special regard from year's end to year's end (Deut. 11 : 10-12), and which he has chosen as a place of rest and renown for His Name in the endless ages coming (Psa. 132 : 13-14 ; Exod. 15 : 17), was promised to the individual and faith-evincing Abraham : and in this promise we are directly interested if we are Abraham's seed (Gal. 3 : 29). That land is the appointed centre for the manifestation of the divine glory in the age to come, and the source from which the covenanted blessedness will yet outflow to universal man. All this is made known to us in the covenants of promise, and brought very clearly before us in this address by the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth " to the mountains of Israel."

" Thus saith the Lord God, Because they (the enemy) have made you desolate, and swallowed you up on every side . . . and ye are taken up in the lips of talkers, and are an infamy of the people : therefore, ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord God ; Thus saith the Lord God to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes, and to the cities that are forsaken "—you see, that is addressed to the land, just in the state in which it now lies—the state that excites the sneer of the common run of men when faith in coming blessedness in connection with it is expressed—such people point to the arid desolation of Palestine, and say, Is this your paradise ? is this your kingdom of God ? Is this your much talked of glorious land ? What can we say ? Our answer will not have much weight with them ; but it is a strong answer for all that. We say, " Our interest and our hopes are in no way due to the excellence of the land itself ; they arise exclusively from God's choice of it and what God has promised concerning it. We believe He has chosen it : we believe what He has promised : and if you do the same, you will share our interest. If you do not believe, it is because you are not cognizant of the evidence which compels belief, or being cognizant of it, choose to ignore it."

What it is that God has to say to the mountains of Israel in their desolation and dishonour ? " Behold, I am for you, and I will turn unto you, and ye shall be tilled and sown : and I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, even all of it : and the cities shall be inhabited, and the wastes shall be builded : and I will multiply upon you man and beast ; and they shall increase and bring fruit : and I will settle you after your old estates, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings : and ye shall know that I am the Lord." Observe the statement : " Ye shall know that I am the Lord."

SEASONS OF COMFORT

There is more force in this than at first sight appears. It is a virtual admission that the state of things existing before this renovation of the land and people of Israel would seem to justify a doubt that Jehovah was participating in their affairs. This is the characteristic of the present situation of things in the earth. We see Israel scattered and blind : their land a derision and a desolation : the Gentiles exercising the upper hand, and nothing to indicate that the God of Israel who brought them out of Egypt is taking any notice, or that He exists at all. An angel appearing now to any leading man of the house of Israel and saying the Lord was with them, would be liable to be answered as Gideon answered a similar salutation on the eve of deliverance from the Midianites : " If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us ? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of ? " (Judges 6 : 13). There is an answer to this natural question as applied to the present state of things. It is contained in the very chapter which records this encouraging address to the mountains of Israel. Look at verse 17 : " Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way, and by their doings : their way was before me as the uncleanness of a separated woman. Wherefore I poured my fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols wherewith they had polluted it : and I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries : according to their way and according to their doings I judged them." Israel's troubles are the result of Israel's sins, and not of the power of the enemy or of God's disregard of what is going on. But there is to be an end of the troubles after a time : " I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you unto your own land."

It is of very great importance to notice the reason of this coming change in the position of the house of Israel. A superficial view would suggest that as Israel's dispersion has been the result of Israel's transgressions, Israel's restoration would be the result of Israel's reformation. The contrary is plainly stated here : " *I do not this for your sakes*, O house of Israel. . . . Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord God, be it known unto you : be ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel " (verses 22, 32). If not for any reason affecting Israel themselves, what is the constraining reason leading to their restoration ? Here it is (verse 22) : " For mine holy name's sake, which ye have profaned among the heathen whither ye went." In what way did Israel profane Jehovah's name in the midst of the heathen (the nations) ? Here is the answer : " When they entered unto the heathen whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they (the heathen) said unto them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land " (20). That is, the effect of Israel's dispersion was to lead to Jehovah's dishonour. Israel was pointed at contemptuously as the people of Jehovah, as much as to say, " If the Jehovah of these people were what they claim, they never would have gone forth out of His land, for how could the Creator of heaven and earth be prevailed against by the Babylonians, the Assyrians, the Greeks and the Romans ? "

Thus as Paul told them, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you" (Rom. 2 : 24). This is one reason of their restoration. God proposes to avert the dishonour of His name by their national recovery : "I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen, which ye have profaned in the midst of them : and the heathen shall know that I am Jehovah, saith the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before your eyes. For I will take you from among the heathen," etc.

If the declaration of Jehovah's coming purpose stopped here, there would be a certain amount of moral confusion which would interfere with the comfort of the prospect. We should feel it strange that a wicked nation should be brought together merely to stop the taunts of Gentile nations, and produce an adequate recognition of the greatness of Jehovah among them. But there is no room for such discomfort. It is a characteristic of all divine ways that more than one purpose is served by the same instrumentality. Jehovah's declaration by Ezekiel goes on to say, "A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you : and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. . . . Then shall ye remember your own evil ways, and your doings that were not good, and shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations" (26-31). Here is the nation in an humbled and reformed condition after restoration. There are frequent glimpses of this in the prophets. Isaiah speaking of the same era of regeneration, says (Isa. 60 : 21) : "Thy people also shall be all righteous : they shall inherit the land for ever." The means by which this great national change is to be effected is revealed in other parts. Jehovah will "give them pastors according to his own heart, who shall feed them with knowledge and understanding" (Jer. 3 : 15). These pastors are the twelve disciples raised from the dead (Matt. 19 : 28), and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets, the glorious hierarchy of the kingdom of God (Luke 13 : 28-29 ; 20 : 35-36). Under such leadership, aided with the latter-day and bountiful outpouring of the Spirit of God on all flesh, Israel will soon be brought to the glorious condition depicted. Some will prove incorrigible, but these will be weeded out : for it is written, "I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies ; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth" (Zeph. 3 : 11-13).

A restored regenerated nation like this will be a praise and a name and a glory to Jehovah in the midst of the earth. We learn that then the Gentile nations will comprehend the mystery of Israel's fall and dispersion during Gentile ascendancy : "The heathen (the nations) shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity : because they trespassed against me, therefore

SEASONS OF COMFORT

hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies : so fell they all by the sword. . . . Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name" (Ezek. 39 : 23, 25).

This object of Israel's restoration—for the honour of Jehovah's name—is the one that least appeals to the sympathies of the natural man. It is one thing that makes the subject so uninteresting and positively distasteful to the common run of people. They might have a kindly thought for the restoration of the Jews on "the principle of nationalities," or because of the vigour of an ancient patriotism, or the interest excited by an historic race ; but this "theological ingredient" mixed up with it excites their aversion. What is this but the prejudice of barbarism ? An enlightened state of mind takes just the opposite attitude. Enlightenment recognizes God as the "possessor of heaven and earth," and the Bible as the present index to His mind ; and His views and objects therein expressed, the ultimate light in which everything is to be contemplated. In this way of looking at things, the divine purpose is the only stable element in the situation. Human life and human history are in themselves but shifting shadows on the ocean—mere elements in the working out of the divine purpose. The "theological ingredient" is the only philosophy of the whole. God's relation to the case gives us the only rational solution of what the highest intellects feel to be the universal mystery. This relation we apprehend by means of the Scriptures and by that means only, and when apprehended, it alters our relation in harmony with itself. We become no longer interested in nations from an ethnological point of view. The "principle of nationalities" and all other aspects as they present themselves to a merely natural observer, fail to interest. They are only apprehended in their actual nature as transient appearances ; phases of affairs incident to the great purpose governing the whole evolution. God's relation to a matter becomes the only real element. Consequently, it comes to pass that while the Jews as a race would excite in the subjects of this enlightenment no interest, and the question of their futurity and the disposal of their land would be dismissed as an arid and uninviting subject, as the factors in a divine problem they excite surpassing and everlasting interest. Standing related to the revelation of God in the past, and involving the working out of His glorious purpose in the future, they become capital and supreme subjects. Involving Jehovah's honour, they are dear to the hearts of all Jehovah's children, while current interests and greatness, bringing with them only the melancholy ascendancy and renown of man, fall dead on their hearts.

Jehovah's jealousy for the honour of His name appears a stern and unattractive feature of the Bible at first ; but a great change comes over the mind when the nature and effects of the jealousy are apprehended. It is not a human jealousy, which denies to others their due. It is the desire for the ascendancy of eternal and beneficial truth. The honour of Jehovah is founded on the eternal constitution of things. All things are in Him ; they are the concretion of His own invisible energy. Consequently, if they are not in harmony with

GOD'S OBJECT IN RESTORING ISRAEL

Him, there can be no well-being. Without the honour of Jehovah, there can be no well-being of man ; for man's highest interests are bound up with the recognition, love, service and obedience of His Creator. In the nature of things, it is man's highest happiness to give to God the highest praise. Consequently, Jehovah's jealousy of His name is one of the glorious attributes of the eternal character. The desolation of Israel's mountains for the time being brings dishonour : for His own glory, He has declared His purpose to recover them from their desolate state, and to people them with His own restored and regenerated nation, and to establish upon them the glorious edifice of His long-promised kingdom for the blessing of all the earth. We have listened to His address to those mountains this morning, and as the children of the hope of Israel, jealous for the honour of Israel's God and earth's Creator, we rejoice in the prospect of the unspeakable blessedness which will descend upon them in due time in the appointed way.



Daniel At Babylon

The depressing effect of our circumstances.—The reading of the Scriptures dispels this dreary illusion.—The ninth chapter of Daniel.—“The realm of the Chaldeans.”—Babylon a wilderness of rubbish mounds.—God will make a full end of all the nations.—Daniel himself.—Studying Jeremiah the prophet.—In good company.—Daniel divinely honoured.—Daniel’s earnest solicitude concerning the affairs of Israel.—A part of his character.—Foreign to the tastes of Gentile society.—One or two features of his prayer.—The opening.—Daniel’s thoughts concerning God.—The dreadfulness of God.—Try for a moment to realize it.—A difficult effort.—The “things that are made.”—An infinitesimal part.—Tokens of matchless wisdom.—The elaborate and delicate mechanisms of insect life.—A few evenings with the microscope.—Turn to man.—The felt presence of eternal wisdom.—The thousands of a great town.—A country.—The globe itself.—Imagination collapses.—Yet the earth but an atom.—The sun itself but a star among countless myriads.—The Being who holds all this in Himself, a “great and dreadful God.”—One personal Father.—Mortal capacity not the measure.—One personality fills and copes with infinite space.—God too great to conceive of, but not too great to believe in.—The Mighty Being and small matters among men on earth.—From the “Milky Way” to Jerusalem.—Impossible to mortal man.—An illusion of superficial thought.—Past eternity and now.—The universe.—The Creator speaking, the mark of true divinity.—The expiry of the period of Babylonish desolation.—Another appointed period of desolation.—Daniel’s prayer and the joint prayers of many Daniels.—The response which Daniel received.—“Seventy weeks.”—“Desolations determined.”—The discouragement it would cause to Daniel.—All past now.—The crucifixion of Christ.—The Sixth Vial.—“The end of the vision.”—The prospect of the sunrise.—Yet a little longer.—Abundance of comfort.

ONE of the advantages of our coming together in this way, and reading the Scriptures together, is, that it helps us to escape from the depressing effect of our own immediate circumstances. These circumstances are apt to impress us with the idea that they are established and that we shall never get away from them. They seem so real and lasting that though in theory we would admit they are only for a time, and that a short time, we are apt to be burdened with the feeling that they will never come to an end, and that things will always be as they are; and these things being evil things, such a feeling concerning them is liable to have the opposite of a helpful and cheering effect. A consideration of the things brought under our notice in the reading of the Scriptures, helps to dispel this dreary illusion and to exhilarate with the enlightened perception that “the world is passing away, and the fashion thereof,” and that we and all our affairs, borne on its bosom, as on a stream, are rapidly drifting to the goal of that futurity the nature of which has been

revealed to us in the writings of the apostles and prophets. This effect is produced as much by the history of what has been as by the promise and prophecy of what is to come. Let us take the example before us in the ninth chapter of Daniel, read this morning.

The first thing that strikes us in the contemplation of the chapter is the fact that, at the writing of it, Daniel was in "the realm of the Chaldeans." That realm was at that time the seat of empire throughout the civilized world. Babylon was the greatest of cities—greater in relation to the world at large than London is at the present time—greater in her imperial consequence—greater in her architectural wonders—greater in topographical extent—greater perhaps in her population—a city of mighty walls, of military greatness, of princely pomp and commercial importance and prosperity. Where is all this greatness? Where is all the glory and the bustle and the prosperity? Go to the banks of the Euphrates today and receive the answer in the wilderness of rubbish mounds that stretch away in miles of silent desolation where great Babylon used to be. What shall we say to this but that "the purpose of the Lord standeth sure"; for was it not written centuries before even Daniel's day: "Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation . . . but wild beasts of the desert shall lie there; and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures" (Isa. 13 : 19). The same word has decreed that God will make a full end of all the nations among whom He has scattered Israel (Jer. 30 : 11), that the time will come when the haughtiness of man throughout the whole earth shall be humbled, and when the Lord alone shall be exalted, and when the whole earth shall be turned into the inheritance of the meek, the habitation of immortals, and the house of Jehovah's praise (Isa. 2 : 11; Psa. 37 : 9; Rev. 21 : 4; Hab. 2 : 14). This will as assuredly come to pass as the passing away of Babylon's glory, and we shall live to rejoice in the mighty change, if meanwhile we honour Jehovah in the reverence and obedience of His word.

Then we look at Daniel himself. What do we find him doing? Studying the book of Jeremiah the prophet, from which he understood that seventy years would be the limit of Israel's desolation in Babylon. We may here note that we are in good company in the habit we have acquired of giving heed to and being interested in the writings of the prophets. If we cannot in this matter comfort ourselves with the countenance and approbation of the wise of this generation, we have the satisfaction of knowing that the prophet Daniel would be with us, if he were in the land of the living, in the place we give to the prophets in our studies and affections. One such is worth more than an army of professors; for Daniel was not only inspired to know what human discernment can never attain however assiduously applied—the knowledge of the future and of the purposes of God, but he was divinely honoured on the very account of his interest in the sure word of prophecy. He was informed that from the first day that he set his heart to understand, and to chasten himself before

SEASONS OF COMFORT

God, his words were heard (chap. 10 : 12), and that he was greatly beloved (verse 11).

We have next to consider the effect of his attention to what had been revealed to Jeremiah. The effect was a very profound interest and a very earnest solicitude concerning the affairs of Israel—a feeling so deep and strong as to lead him to make those affairs the subject of “prayer and supplication, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes” (verse 3). This was not by command or as the acting of a part assigned to him. It was the voluntary and natural expression of Daniel’s individual feelings. A certain communication of prophecy resulted from what he did ; and we are rather liable to assume that all that Daniel did was a matter of course, and part of the divine arrangement. By this assumption, we deprive ourselves of part of the benefit of Daniel’s example which like every other part of Scripture was “written for our learning.” Daniel’s interest in the affairs of Israel was a spontaneous interest and part of his character. It is part of the character of every man who is really a child of the hope of Israel. It requires no simulation. It is not an artificial requirement. It is the natural state of the man’s affections who is begotten again to the lively hope that springs out of the purpose of God with the house of Israel. It is a something entirely foreign to the tastes and sentiments of all ranks and classes of Gentile society. The hope of Israel is an unfashionable affair altogether ; and if we have to own and feel that in entertaining this hope we are outside the circle of popular sympathies, we can at all events reflect with satisfaction that we have the society and good fellowship of the prophet Daniel pronounced “greatly beloved” by an angel of God, and commended to our attention by the Lord Jesus Himself.

Let us ponder one or two features of his prayer. Mark the opening words of his address to God : “O Lord, the great and dreadful God.” This indicates one of Daniel’s thoughts concerning God which may not be common, but which is undoubtedly natural to the subject. It may not occur to us at first sight to think of God as the “dreadful” God. We think of Him as the good, the wise, the great. If we do not think of Him as the dreadful, it is because our minds do not easily rise to the estimation of His greatness. In proportion as the mind opens to a just conception of the greatness will it be impressed with the dreadfulness of the Being who contains in Himself the inconceivable immensity of the universe. It has been the characteristic of great minds in all ages to realize the dreadfulness of God in this aspect. It is a sign of greatness to be thus impressed and to have a sense of man’s smallness. It is a sign of smallness when man, either in self or neighbour, seems great, and when the universe is powerless to impress.

Let us try for a moment to realize how much reason there is to think of God as the language of Daniel describes Him : “The great and dreadful God.” It is a difficult effort, but one which is edifying, and which perhaps becomes easier with the endeavour. We can only rise to it through what we see and know. That which we see

and know is a part of the greatness so to speak, by the interpretation of which, we are enabled, though in a very feeble measure, to apprehend that which cannot be seen or known. As Paul expresses it, "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead" (Rom. 1 : 20). The "things that are made" are before our eyes, at least a part of them—an infinitesimal part. In whichever way we look at them—if we look at them with the eye of intelligence, we see the tokens of matchless wisdom in combination with stupendous power everywhere. Beginning with the smallest objects, such as require microscopic aid to enable us to see them, we see the perfection of mechanical skill in the adaptation of means to ends. The structure of invisible plants, the organization of the minutest animalcula, show the presence of contriving wisdom even more palpably, perhaps, than the finished machinery of human life, or the beautiful proportions of the large animals, or even the balanced motions of the heavenly bodies ; for in these cases, there is something on which the mind can plausibly rest the notion of self-evolution and regulation of the forces at play ; but who can apply the principle of "development" by exercise and "the survival of the fittest" to the elaborate and delicate mechanisms by which the functions of insect life—visible and invisible—in their endless diversification of form and exigency, are discharged ? A few evenings with the microscope will enable anyone to feel the force of this. From the teeming world of life in a glass of water, you turn to man, who seems by comparison a giant of colossal proportions. Here in every part of his organization is a machinery of exquisite contrivance and arrangement for the generation and utilization of life in its highest animal form. From the crimson corpuscles of his blood, which can only be seen under the microscope, to the graceful contour of his elohistic form and figure, his being in every atom and aspect of it, brings with it the felt presence of eternal wisdom, which from without, has fashioned into these exquisite forms, the material supplying the basis of the organization. Then from one man you go to the thousands of a great town. From a town, you extend your thoughts to a country even so small as Britain, which with its thousands of square miles and its millions of population, baffles you in the attempt to mentally weigh it, as it were. When from Britain, you vainly try to grasp the globe itself, you recoil dismayed. Your puny imagination collapses. Your mind will not stretch out to take it in. You are at the end of your journey long before you leave your native shore. Yet the earth is but an atom in the mass of the universe—a speck on the fields of space. Yea, the sun itself, many thousands of times the dimensions of the earth—and around which the earth makes humble journey—is but a star among the countless myriads of orbs that deck the shining firmament. These are not fables but demonstrable facts. The "Milky Way" is but an aggregation of the distant starry host so dense as to seem a cloud of glory. Are we not baffled, staggered, bewildered, overpowered by the greatness ? It is a greatness that is a fact before our eyes. Is

SEASONS OF COMFORT

not the Being who holds this in Himself, a "great and dreadful God"?

The dreadfulness is so great that we are liable to be drawn through to the other side of the subject, so to speak, and to feel as if the idea of one personal Father were incompatible with such inconceivable immensity. This tendency we must resist. It is a mere feeling resulting from our smallness. It is not an induction of reason. If there is any reason in it at all, it is false reasoning. It starts with the assumption that mortal capacity is the measure by which the verities of heaven and earth are to be measured. It argues that because our created brains—mere agglomerations of atoms—cannot realize how one personality could fill and cope with infinite space, therefore there cannot be such a personality. Anyone can see the logical fallacy of this. There were eternal power and wisdom before our brains appeared on the scene, and those were in unity; for creation is a unit as we see. Our brains are a mere contrivance of this power and wisdom in unity. Shall the limited, feeble perishable contrivance set up its sensations in judgment upon the Eternal Contriver? This is what is done when men say the idea of God is too great for them to believe in. They are to be excused if they say God is too great for them to conceive of; for as the Scriptures testify and reason declares, "His greatness is unsearchable": but when they say, "Therefore I will not believe in the existence of his greatness," then they perform the most stupendous feat of folly, and earn the treatment to be accorded to men without understanding. Be it ours rather to recognize the self-evident fact that "the Creator of the ends of the earth, who fainteth not, neither is weary, and of whose understanding there is no searching" (Isa. 40 : 28), is a great and dreadful God whom we shall adore, and trust, and worship and obey, and before whom we will order our ways with the modesty becoming mere worms of the earth as we are, when compared with the sons of light, as we hope to become in His great goodness and mercy.

There is one other feeling which is natural and which we must equally keep at bay. We may avoid the mistake of making the surrounding greatness a reason for disbelieving in the personal form of that greatness in its root and power, and fall into another mistake equally hurtful. When we have scanned immensity, we may think it an incongruous idea that the Mighty Being in whom it all consists should deal with such small matters as occurrences among men on the earth which are less to Him than the motions of mites in a cheese are to us. From the "Milky Way" to Jerusalem may seem an impossible descent. Perhaps it does, but to whom does it so appear? To small man. Resist the feeling as the voice of unreason. Such a conjunction is only impossible to a mortal man. It is not for mortal man to judge the ways of God. It is part of the greatness of God to deal with the small as well as the great—to note the "thoughts and intents" of an individual heart as well as to regulate the stupendous movements of suns and systems. It is part of His greatness to sustain the numberless stars (Isa. 40 : 22, 26), and at the same time,

deal with His people Israel according to the law given by the hand of Moses. Dismiss the opposite feeling as an illusion of superficial thought. Say to Deism, which makes God too great to attend to small things, "Get thee behind me, Satan." True reason is on the side of the Bible representation of matters. There must be detail to every form of things. There cannot be divine wisdom at work in the universe as a whole without that wisdom affecting its every part. You must either deny the wisdom in the general or admit it in the particular : deny it in the organization of heaven and earth or admit it in the resurrection of Jesus ; deny it in past eternity or admit it now ; deny it in the fields of space or admit it in the history of Israel. Of what avail would be wisdom in the general if not applicable in the particular. Of what true wisdom would be the splendour of the universe without a distribution of goodness to those inhabiting it ? The framework exists for the filling in : the platform for the performers : heaven and earth for the fellowship of God and man. The Creator of all things speaking to man upon earth, so far from being the narrow conception, which the wisdom of the wise would stigmatize it, is the mark of true divinity. Let us bow before the glorious truth of the matter and rejoice. Let us take our place by the side of Daniel the "man greatly beloved," as he pours out his soul in confession of the sins of Israel when the time for promised favour had arrived.

Daniel says, "We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments ; neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. . . . Therefore hath the Lord watched upon the evil, and brought it upon us : for the Lord our God is righteous in all his works which he doeth. . . . Now, therefore, O our God, hear the prayer of thy servant, and his supplications, and cause thy face to shine upon thy sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. O my God, incline thine ear, and hear ; open thine eyes, and behold our desolations, and the city which is called by thy name : for we do not present our supplications before thee for our righteousnesses, but for thy great mercies." Thus Daniel prayed in his old age, on the expiry of the appointed period of Babylonish desolation. We live at the expiry of another period of desolation—much longer and more general, even "the times of the Gentiles" spoken of by Jesus, during which Jerusalem was to be trodden under foot (Luke 21 : 24). Have we not "understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the Lord came" to Daniel the prophet, and to his brother and fellow-exile in after years in Patmos, that he would accomplish 1,260 years in the desolation of Jerusalem, from the time of the establishment of the desolating abomination of the seven hills ? And shall we not each at least in the privacy of his own impassioned petition, set our faces unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplication, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes ? He that is able to receive it let him receive it, and the joint prayers of many such Daniels, within their closed doors, may bring

SEASONS OF COMFORT

forth a response such as, in the dreariness of their acquaintance with evil, they scarcely allow themselves to anticipate.

The response which Daniel received must have perplexed him sorely. While the words were yet in his mouth, the angel Gabriel came to him and touched him (to bring him into sympathy), and said, "O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplication the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved; therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision." So far, this was very comforting; but Gabriel proceeded to inform Daniel, who was anticipating immediate forgiveness and restoration (now that the end of the seventy years had arrived), that "seventy weeks" were "determined," or set apart, or arranged, concerning his people and the holy city, "to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity," etc.; that this work would be accomplished in the cutting off of the "Messiah the Prince" (verse 25); that to the time of his appearing for this work, there would elapse the entire period of the seventy weeks except one, from the date of the coming forth of the then impending imperial decree for the restoration and re-building of Jerusalem: that after his appearing, "the people of the prince that shall come should *destroy the city and the sanctuary*"; that to the end of the war "desolations were determined" (verse 26), "even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolator." Here was a something concerning which Daniel might well say as he said of another matter, "I heard, but I understood not." He was looking for restoration; his expectation was right; it was endorsed by the angel Gabriel, in speaking of the forthcoming "commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem." But after the restoration, here was the Messiah to be cut off, the city and sanctuary again to be destroyed, and the indefinite prevalence of desolation till a certain consummation, when the judgments appointed would be poured upon the desolator. (It says "desolate" in the common version, but it ought to be "desolator".) It appears all very straightforward to us, because we have the fulfilment of the prophecy to guide us in the understanding of the matter. But we cannot easily realize the discouragement it would cause to Daniel, whose interest and expectations were so strongly aroused on behalf of down-trodden Israel. Something of the intensity of his disappointment may be gathered from what he says in connection with the vision of the latter days, "the time appointed" for which, he says, "was long." "In those days I Daniel was mourning three full weeks." However, that is all past now. What we have to do is to look at the general bearings of the matter for our profit.

The seventy weeks have become plain from the course of events. They did not begin in Daniel's day; for though in the very year of his death the proclamation of Cyrus was issued, authorizing and inviting all Jews to "go up" to the land, "the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem" did not come forth with effect till the twentieth of Artaxerxes, nearly seventy years after (see Neh. 2).

In that year, "the walls of Jerusalem were (still) broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire" (Neh. 2 : 13). The date of the decree by the hand of Nehemiah was 456 B.C. : the year of Christ's death A.D. 34—total 490. Consequently the "weeks" of the vision were weeks of years : $7 \times 70 = 490$. The cup of Israel's abomination was filled up by the crucifixion of Christ, and in retribution thereof, the Romans were divinely employed to "destroy the city and the sanctuary" : and to the end of the war, desolations prevailed, as "determined." These desolations have prevailed until now ; but the time of the "consummation" has arrived, and they are beginning to abate. "That which is determined" is being "poured out upon the desolator." The desolator in the current epoch, is the Turk, and the Sixth Vial has been poured upon him with the effect of consuming and destroying his dominion and preparing the way of the kings of the east. This is the process now going on before our eyes ; the desolator drying up, and the way opening for Israel's restoration. The process may appear slow, but it is unmistakable, and not really slow when estimated at the rate of historic progress. The effect of "the end of the vision" is very different from the effect of the beginning of it. At the beginning of it, there was a long prospect of darkness and downtreading which made Daniel dejected and cast down ; at the end of it the prospect of the sunrise is calculated to make us feel in the mood expressed in Solomon's Song, "Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone ; the flowers appear on the earth ; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land ; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." Thus will the Lord address his Bride on his arrival at the soon-coming end of the present dismal night. We sing with truth :

Long hath the night of sorrow reigned,
The dawn shall bring us light ;
God shall appear, and we shall rise
With gladness in His sight.

Yet a little longer, and he that shall come will come. He will not always tarry. Only for the appointed time will he leave the earth unillumined and uncomforted by his presence. He will say to us in due time as he would say now if he might but speak, "Be of good cheer !" "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold."

We have need of comfort : for the night is dark and cold and prolonged, and the voices of snarling wolves fill the air. There is abundance of comfort for us in the holy oracles ; but with our weakness we often fail to get the full benefit. Let us never despair, but ever renew the conflict while the necessity lasts. The assembling of ourselves together helps us. In this attitude of obedience, God may have compassion upon us and help us still further in the wondrous ways open to Him with whom all things are possible.

Miracle And Prophecy

Building one another up in the faith.—Believe the works.—A teacher come from God.—The works that Jesus did.—Seen and heard.—A challenge to reason.—Appeal to facts.—By no means purely a matter of faith.—3,000 years' fulfilment of prophecy.—Powerful testimony of the divinity of our foundation.—No prophetic power in the earth.—Prophetic power a common feature of Jewish history not operating now.—The explanation.—Foretold that vision should cease.—The strangest of all prophecy.—Something tougher still.—Hopeless embarrassments of unbelief.—The only view admissible.—The works of the apostles.—The apostles in their graves, but they being dead, yet speak.—The evidence of their work before our eyes.—What was it they did?—Something extraordinary.—Their doctrine and their argument no private affair.—Christ, executed in public, risen from the dead.—A forty days' association.—A hundred witnesses.—The very leader of the persecution a preacher of the resurrection.—Personal witness not the only instrumentality.—Signs and wonders and divers miracles, and double witness.—Exercise of miraculous power in attestation of the apostolic testimony.—Extensive conviction.—“Believers, multitudes both of men and women.”—Strength to confidence, courage to faith.—Shortly confidence will be rewarded.—Glory and joy.

WE are here this morning to build one another up in the faith that has come by Jesus Christ. There are various ways of doing this. Certainly none is more effectual than the one which is touched in a saying of Christ's read in our hearing this morning. He said to the Jews who opposed him, “If ye believe not me, *believe the works.*” Here was an appeal to evidence—to facts. He bases his claim to be received as the Messiah on reasons in the shape of facts which could not be explained apart from his possession of that character. He told his disciples that the Jews would be held responsible for their rejection of him on this very ground—that they had evidence placed before them which could not be mistaken. He said, “If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin : but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father” (John 15 : 24). The works he did were of a nature not to be explained away. They could not be understood on any principle except that God was with the worker of them. This was recognized by the Jews themselves as appears from the words of Nicodemus, one of their leading men, who came to see Jesus by night. He said, “Rabbi, WE KNOW that thou art a teacher come from God ; for *no man can do these miracles that thou doest except God be with him*” (John 3 : 2). As a matter of fact, it is testified that “among the chief rulers many believed on him ; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue : for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God ” (John 12 : 42).

The works that Jesus did were all of a character to carry with them the conviction of his divinity. They were not like the feats of sorcerers or the performances of wizards and magicians. They were

not done secretly. They were not done in the dark. They required no appliances. They were done in the open day, and by means beyond human control, such as when with a word, he cured in an instant a dying child at a long distance off, or quelled a storm with a command, or walked on the sea by his will, or fed thousands with a few loaves. It was to such things he appealed when John the Baptist, languishing in prison, began to wonder at the delay in the effectuation of the Messianic mission, and sent two of his disciples with the question : "Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?" We are informed (Luke 7 : 21) that "in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached."

To the Pharisees he said, "If I do not the works of my Father, *believe me not.*" In these few and simple words, he throws down a challenge to reason which cannot successfully be taken up. They are words that cover the whole ground of revelation. They illustrate the nature of God's whole appeal to man. It is an appeal to facts. God asks no man to believe without giving him a reason for believing. From the time Moses wrought his three signs in the presence of the elders of Israel, in proof that the message he brought was from God, to the day (1,500 years afterwards) when "with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 4 : 33), God confirming their words with signs following (Mark 16 : 20)—throughout the whole of that protracted period, human submission was never required except on the strength of facts reasonably demanding it. Our position this morning is of that character. In the faith we exercise and the obedience we render to Christ, we stand on facts to a much greater extent than most people realize. It is by no means purely a matter of faith, in the popular sense of the term. The work of God is already largely accomplished. We are not like Abraham, who merely had a promise of Christ. We have had Christ himself in the accomplishment of a part of his work. True, Abraham had angelic visits, which we have not, and thus our cases are equalized. We live not in the age of the prophets, but more than any previous generation, we live in the age of prophecy fulfilled. We look back on a 3,000 years' fulfilment, embracing every topic with which prophecy deals, except the culminating glory. Surveying that extensive retrospect, we see Babylon brought to nothing, Persia overthrown by Greece, Egypt reduced to political baseness, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, Syria, and other adjacent countries desolated, Jesus born at Bethlehem, despised and rejected, wounded and slain in the house of his friends; Israel dispersed among the nations and Jerusalem down-trodden of the Gentiles for centuries, and Rome in varied foretold phases in political and ecclesiastical ascendancy over "peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues." In our own days, before our own eyes, we see the nations armed, through French influence;

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Turkey at the verge of dissolution through political evaporation ; and Israel's land and people coming into remembrance after a long night of neglect and forgetfulness.

This mighty record of prophecy fulfilled is a more powerful testimony of the divinity of our foundation, than would be prophecy uttered in our midst ; for in that case, we should have to wait to see if it came to pass, whereas here is the evidence complete before our eyes of the truth of what Paul says, that God " at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets."

Non-thinking, or unprincipled men, affect to make light of fulfilled prophecy, as if it proved nothing. No man, exercising a competent reason, can think in this manner. It requires but a moment's reflection to perceive that there is no prophetic power in the earth at the present time. There are two features in English public life that would be sure, under the strain of human avarice, to have brought it to the front, if it had existed anywhere—the Stock Exchange and racecourse. We are all aware that a day's foreknowledge, in either of these institutions would enable its possessor to make a fortune at a sweep. Yet behold the helplessness of the astutest of men with regard to the events of twenty-four hours ahead ! Why is it that, with the highest development of the human intellect, and the profoundest knowledge of nature yet attained in human history, there should be a total absence of prophetic power, while this prophetic power was a common feature of Jewish history up to a certain point ? It is evident there was a something operating then that is not operating now. The Jewish race are as numerous now as then, yet the Jews are as barren as the Gentiles of the prophetic gift. The Jews have had no prophets among them for 1,800 years. What is the explanation ? It is furnished by a prophecy in Amos (8 : 11), where, amongst other consequences of Israel's incorrigible disobedience, this is decreed : " Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord : and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it." By Micah also (chapter 3 : 6-7) it was foretold that vision should cease, and that there should be no answer from God. By this the disappearance of prophecy is explained ; but, at the same time, the divinity of former prophecy fulfilled, and the strangest of all prophecy, a prophecy that prophecy should cease for a time. If prophecy were a natural power, in the sense contended for by the disbelievers of prophecy, here is a curious phenomenon for them to explain—natural power prophesying that natural power shall cease ; that is, prophesying an impossibility, according to the naturalist hypothesis, for, by that hypothesis, the ways of nature are immutable—their great argument against miracle. But there is something tougher still for the naturalist to deal with. If prophecy, as a natural gift (!) is so accurate in its forecasts as to be suspended in accordance with its own prediction, what reason can he show for not expecting all its other forecasts to be realized as well ? Why not the Jewish restoration ? the kingdom of God ? the coming

of Christ? the resurrection of the dead?—for all these are explicitly foretold by the same “sure word of prophecy” that foretold the disappearance of prophecy.

The subject is involved in hopeless embarrassments away from the simple and inevitable explanation that God spoke by the prophets, enabling them, as Daniel expressed it, to show what should come to pass hereafter. This is the only view admissible in view of all the facts: a view that brings with it the glorious guarantee of good things to come, even those covenanted mercies to the fathers which God has sworn by Himself to bring to pass on earth when there shall be no more curse, no more pain, no more death; but when the earth shall be a scene of effective and glorious and joyful life to the glory of Him from whose hand all things have come.

“If ye believe not me, believe the works.” Men may fail in capacity to discern that Christ himself is an all-sufficient reason for believing in him, even apart from the evidence of his “works.” Christ allows the possibility of such infirmity. But a man must be far below the ordinary level of reason who can shut his eyes to the significance of his “works.” From the place where we stand in the nineteenth century, we must comprise in these works the works of the apostles: for the works of the apostles were the works of Christ. They did them in his name and by his power. It is impossible to separate the apostles from Christ. Some in our day would make a distinction. They say, “Give us the words of Christ: we do not care so much for the apostles.” This is altogether artificial and false. It is in flat contradiction to Christ’s own declaration to his disciples in sending them forth: “He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me.” By this rule, the man who slights the apostles slights God. It is what John said: “We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6). A man’s treatment of the apostles is therefore a test of his position before God. To talk of preferring the words of Christ to the words of the apostles is to speak unenlightenedly. Jesus and his disciples were “all one,” as he prayed the Father that it might be (John 17:21). In considering the “works” of Christ, we must therefore include the apostles, not that when Jesus spoke of them to the Pharisees, he meant to include them, because at that time, the apostolic work was an affair of futurity; but standing where we do, and looking back, we must take the apostolic work into account as part of the “works” that bear testimony that Christ is of God.

It may be said we live too late in the day to be witnesses of the apostolic work, seeing the apostles are in their graves and their work a long-past affair. The remark is true, but there is a sense in which they “being dead yet speak.” They have left their mark behind them. The evidence of their work is before our eyes. What is the meaning of Christendom? How come whole nations to profess the name of Christ in ever so nominal a way? How come there to be State Church establishments throughout the world? How comes the name of

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Christ, in the form of "the year of our Lord," to be in every legal document throughout the civilized world? The consideration of these simple questions will guide us into the presence of the apostles; for no explanation satisfactory to reason can be given of these facts apart from what they did in the first century. What was it they did? Here, again, reason demands that it must have been something extraordinary; for how, without some extraordinary power at work, could a company of poor and illiterate men have succeeded in laying the foundation of Christendom, in persuading thousands, in all parts of the Roman Empire, to accept a doctrine and practice which brought upon them the disabilities of the law and the persecution of the authorities, the alienation of friends, and the loss of property, reputation, and liberty—yea, even life itself?

Immeasurably powerful becomes this argument when we consider what was their doctrine, and what their argument in support of it. Our knowledge of these comes to us with the apostolic writings. Here again, we stand face to face with facts. The New Testament is a fact. It is not a fact of yesterday. Even if its age were a matter of doubt, its own character is conclusive of its genuineness in every sense, but its age is not in doubt. It comes down to us through channels excluding the possibility of uncertainty on this point. It comes to us through multitudes in every country, and in different languages, and in multiplied copies. It is no private affair. It has been public property for ages. We have every guarantee possible in such a case that the apostolic writings, as we now have them, were in circulation among Christians of the first century during the lives of the apostles.

From these apostolic writings, then, we learn that their doctrine was that Jesus Christ, recently executed in public as a malefactor, had risen from the dead, as the beginning or foundation of a future work of God towards the children of men. Let every one carefully read the Acts of the Apostles, and he will find that this is the kernel of the apostolic proclamation. Their doctrine was a matter of fact—not of speculation. What proof did they offer of the fact? First, their own personal witness. "We are his witnesses," said Peter before the Jewish council (Acts 5:32). The personal testimony of proved honesty is always weighty; but the weight is greatly increased in this case by the fact that not only can no reason be suggested why the witnesses should speak falsely, but every reason why their testimony should be in the other direction. Nothing was to be gained by testifying to the resurrection but shame, confusion, imprisonment, and death. An habitually honest man may, in an extreme case, be betrayed into untruth when his interest is served by it; but when an honest man persists in a statement that tells against his dearest interests, what conclusion is there, but that he speaks what he believes to be the truth? This was the case with the apostles. For three years and a half, they had been preachers of righteousness with Christ, calling on the people to repent. Christ was arrested and slain. At first overwhelmed by the calamity, these men appeared before the Jewish public, and asserted the resurrection of Christ as a fact, brought within their personal cognition by a forty days' association with him after

resurrection. Their testimony was odious to the Jewish authorities, who enjoined silence on them under the severest penalties. They disregarded the interdict. They proclaimed the fact of Christ's resurrection more and more widely. "We cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard" (Acts 4 : 20) was their excuse. Their perseverance cost imprisonment and every undesirable consequence ; but they persevered. It was not one apostle only : it was twelve. It was not twelve apostles only : it was a hundred besides (Acts 1 : 15 ; 1 Cor. 15 : 6). It was not these only, but the very leader of the persecution movement, in the very midst of his most energetic enterprises against the Christians, suddenly became a preacher of the resurrection of Christ, on the ground that Christ had appeared to him in open daylight, in the presence of a band of officers, who were felled to the ground by the glory ; and had left his mark on him in the shape of closed-up eyes for a season. "This thing," as he said to king Agrippa, "was not done in a corner." It was done openly, in the presence of officials, who were not produced to contradict Paul, though the Jews had it in their power to do so, as also to have closed the mouths of the twelve, by producing the body of the Lord Jesus, if the resurrection had been an invented story.

But personal witness was not the only instrumentality employed in producing conviction of Christ's resurrection. This was weighty enough ; but as if allowing the possibility of the people reasonably fearing some mistake, notwithstanding the earnestness and unanimity of the witnesses, God "confirmed their words with signs following." So Mark testifies (16 : 20). So Paul also testifies : "God also *bearing them witness*, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit" (Heb. 2 : 4). To this "witness" Jesus referred in his promise to the disciples, "When the Comforter is come whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, *he shall testify of me* : and YE ALSO shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning" (John 15 : 26). To this double witness, when it came to be a fact, Peter alluded in the presence of the Jewish Council when he said, "We are his witnesses of these things ; and so is also the *Holy Spirit, which God hath given to them that obey him*" (Acts 5 : 32). The form in which the Spirit bore witness is indicated in the prayer of the apostles : "Grant unto thy servants that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal ; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus" (Acts 4 : 29). This prayer was answered. "By the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people . . . in-somuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them. There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them that were vexed with unclean spirits : and they were healed every one" (Acts 5 : 12, 15). The natural result of this exercise of miraculous power in attestation of the apostolic testimony that Christ had risen, was to induce extensive conviction. "Believers were the more added

SEASONS OF COMFORT

to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (verse 14). In the case of the Samaritans, "The people with one accord gave heed to those things which were spoken by Philip, *hearing and seeing the miracles which he did*" (Acts 8 : 6). In the case of the Asiatics, at the hands of Paul, "All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul : so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them . . . So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed" (Acts 19 : 10, 12, 20).

The mighty hold which Christianity took upon the Roman Empire in the first century in the teeth of the most violent opposition on the part of the authorities, cannot be explained apart from these facts. The perception of this is edifying, or building up : it imparts strength to the confidence in which we stand, gives courage to faith, and resoluteness to our obedience of Christ, around whom all these things centre. Shortly our confidence will be justified and rewarded, by the occurrence of the great event of which they are to us the guarantee—the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ, who, though absent from the earth so long, is only absent for a season, during which he is a watchful spectator of the work to which we stand related, the development of a people by trial, in circumstances of darkness, and weakness, and downtreading, for the mutual glory and joy of Christ and them in the day of his appearing.

Christ Our Passover

Institution of the memorial supper.—Feast of the passover.—Never such a momentous celebration of it.—Israel's deliverance from Egypt.—Christ himself eating the Passover.—As much interested retrospectively as his disciples.—In as much need of redemption.—The foundation of human salvation.—“The first begotten of the dead.”—The typical feast superseded.—Another institution.—“Until he come.”—Bread from the remains of the Passover—“my body” given for you.—The condemnation of sin in the flesh.—By his accepted offering, all sanctified who come unto God through him.—“This cup.”—The new covenant.—The old covenant.—Pronounced a curse.—“A schoolmaster.”—Established first principles.—Done away when Christ ate the passover.—The new covenant “established upon better promises.”—Why offered in blood.—Symbolic cup of wine.—Blood sacrificially employed to represent life.—The ceremonial declaration of Jehovah's righteousness.—A basis for free pardon.—No blessedness without covenant.—No covenant without sacrifice.—No sacrifice but one.—No association with that sacrifice but by enlightenment.—The root of the whole matter.—This breaking of bread our acceptance of God's way.—The reputation of being illiberal.—“The preaching of the cross.”—In the best of company.—The modern Greeks.—The Jews.—What we say to each and all.

WHEN Jesus instituted the memorial supper which we have met this morning to observe, he was surrounded by his disciples in an upper room in Jerusalem, where he had met them by appointment to keep the feast of the passover. That feast was part of the Mosaic appointments. The meeting was on the basis of the law of Moses; for Jesus and the disciples were all Jews, born and bred under that law, which had been in force 1,400 years. It was the last time they met together on that foundation, but not the last time they will eat the passover together, for he said: “With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

The feast had been observed on countless previous occasions, and with an ostentation not to be found in that upper room among those quiet thirteen men; but never had there been such a momentous celebration of it. The whole law, of which the passover was a part, was converging for its finish in the one sorrowful man who was the centre of that group. “Christ our passover, sacrificed for us,” was about to absorb in himself the significance of all that Israel had observed for ages in obedience to the law of Moses, and therefore of the passover which he was now about to eat for the last time as a mortal son of Abraham.

The passover was instituted on the eve of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. It was not merely a celebration of deliverance, but a means of it, which it is well to bear in mind in judging of its fulfilment in Christ. The angel of Jehovah was about to pass through the land

SEASONS OF COMFORT

for the purpose of destroying the first-born in every Egyptian house, that the Egyptians might be made to consent to Israel's departure. But there was a possibility that this destroying visitation might extend to the houses of the Hebrews as well. To avert this possibility—we need not stay to inquire in what way—every family in Israel was required to slay a lamb, sprinkle its blood on the door post, and eat its flesh before the morning. The destroying angel seeing the sprinkled blood would *pass over* the household so protected, for which reason it was called passover, as we know. Afterwards Israel were to keep the same passover in their generations, in celebration of their deliverance, first from the destroying angel, and next from the Egyptians.

Before the sacrifice of "Christ our passover," we have here himself eating the passover with his disciples, in token of the fact that he was involved with them in all their woes, from which his own blood, the blood of the anti-typical passover, would deliver them all; for though it harmonizes not with orthodox conceptions of the sacrifice of Christ, it is the truth that the "God of peace brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, *through the blood of the everlasting covenant*" (Heb. 13 : 20). The passover was a memorial of the deliverance effected in Egypt, and a typical foreshadowing of the deliverance to be effected in Christ. It looked back and it looked forward. In both, Jesus was concerned. As the "son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt. 1 : 1) he was as much interested retrospectively in the Egyptian deliverance as his disciples, who were to be considered as having come out of Egypt in their fathers; as the son of Mary, partaking of their common sin-caused mortality (for death entered into the world by sin—Rom. 5 : 12), he stood in as much need as they of that redemption from death, which he finally attained through the shedding of his own blood, as the antitypical lamb of Jehovah's passover (Heb. 9 : 12—omit ital. "for us"; also chap. 5 : 7). Where he differed was in the mental state resulting from the fact that God was his father in the generative sense. He was God's well-beloved son, in whom God was well pleased, because he abode in His commandments, and did always those things that were pleasing unto Him (John 15 : 10 ; 8 : 29). He also differed in the Father's abiding presence in the fulness of the Spirit in the vessel so prepared. He was the Father's human manifestation in the midst of Israel, for the purpose of laying the foundation of human salvation in harmony with the principle of the Father's supremacy which required in the blood-shedding of such as partake of human mortality, the declaration of the Father's righteousness as the basis of the remission of sin unto life eternal to those recognizing and submitting to it. The work was accomplished in his death and resurrection, by which he became "the first begotten of the dead" (Rev. 1 : 5) and a name by investiture with which men may be saved—the only name given under heaven for this purpose (Acts 4 : 12).

When Jesus observed the passover, the time was at hand for his own offering up by which the significance of the typical feast would be superseded. He, therefore, takes occasion to appoint another

institution by which the antitypical accomplishment itself would be kept before the minds of believers "until he come." Beautifully enough, he finds the elements of the new type in those of the old, for both had their ultimate significance in the same thing. He took bread from the remains of the passover feast and broke it and said, "This is my body which is given for you : this do in remembrance of me." This saying which must have been enigmatical to the disciples at the time of its utterance, was illustrated on the following day, when Jesus surrendered himself to the cross on which his body was cruelly and publicly impaled, underneath an accusation which was no disgrace, but the utterance of the simple truth : "This is Jesus the King of the Jews." This agonizing tragedy, so far as the human aspect of it was concerned, was the divinely arranged public condemnation of sin in the flesh—the declaration of the righteousness of God in the offering of the body of Jesus once for all—a body which was at once the condemned nature of Adam and the sinless Son of God, in whose death the righteous law of God had its execution, and in whose resurrection the perfect righteousness of Jesus had its vindication, and by which double event a man was provided through whom came the resurrection of the dead without any nullification of any of the ways of God. All this was involved in the words of Jesus, "This is my body given for you." The whole arrangement was "for (or, on account of) those who shall be saved," but of course included in its operation Jesus himself, who is the "firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8 : 29). By this accepted offering, all are sanctified who come unto God through him, confessing their sins, humbling themselves in the obedience of baptism, which ceremonially introduces them to the death of Christ.

The same glorious lesson comes out with equal clearness in connection with the cup, which he took after the bread, saying, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves . . . This cup is *the new testament in my blood*, shed for many for the remission of sins." If this was a strange saying to the disciples at the time of its utterance it did not remain so, for it was the topic of conversation after his resurrection. And it is not strange to those in our day who scripturally understand the truth, for it has been the subject of exposition in the apostolic writings. But put it to the common run of Christians : "the new testament (or covenant) in my blood." What understanding have they of its meaning ? Ask them a plainer question : What is the new covenant ? What are the covenants of promise to which believers are no longer strangers ? (Eph. 2 : 12). What are the promises made unto the fathers which Christ came to confirm ? (Rom. 15 : 8). To these questions there is no response on the part of the common run of Christians, or on the part of their teachers, the so-called "Rev." gentlemen of all denominations. If the new covenant itself is not known, how can its relations in the blood of Christ be discerned ?

We have learnt from the Scriptures what the new covenant is. Its name, as the *new* covenant, involves an allusion to the old one that was established at Sinai when God, by the hands of Moses,

SEASONS OF COMFORT

promised to bless Israel in the land to which they were going, on condition of obedience ; and Israel, on their part, undertook to submit to whatever was required of them. This old contract, or agreement, or covenant (ratified by the sprinkling of the blood of sacrificial animals), pronounced a curse on every one who should not observe its obligations in every particular : and these were very numerous and entered into every relation of life. Such a rigid and absolute observance being impossible in the infirmity of human nature, Peter styles it " a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear " (Acts 15 : 10). No one rendered the exact obedience it required but Christ. It served its purpose, however. God did not make a mistake in appointing it. It was " a schoolmaster " : it established the first principles of godliness in the midst of Israel, namely, that obedience to God was the first law of human well-being, and that man was unable to bless himself. Still, so far as practical results were concerned, it cursed all who had to do with it, since none but Christ was able to comply with its requirements in the perfect manner required. This old curse-bringing covenant was about to be done away when Christ ate the passover for the last time with his disciples. It was about to be done away in him by his dying under it after having perfectly obeyed it, and rising again from the dead because of his righteousness under it ; and in him, thus triumphant over the old covenant, the new covenant was to be established and offered—a covenant, says Paul, " established upon better promises " (Heb. 8 : 6). These promises he styles, " promises made to the fathers " (Rom. 15 : 8). What these are we have learnt. They are contained in the writings of Moses and the Prophets. They are promises of future blessedness on earth to Abraham and his seed (Gal. 3 : 16)—a blessedness connected with the inheritance of the land of promise, and involving the bestowal of everlasting life. The new covenant is based upon these. It is a more beneficial covenant than the old. It is an agreement that if we have faith in what God has accomplished in Christ, and bring ourselves in connection with it in a humble, loving, obedient disposition, our sins will be forgiven, and we ourselves made heirs of the blessedness promised to Abraham and his seed.

But why should this covenant be offered in blood ? Why should Jesus, taking the symbolic cup of wine, say, " This is the new covenant in my blood " ? There is a simple meaning to this, which we shall get at by a few questions. In what character is blood brought forward in the Mosaic shadow from which much of the phraseology of the new covenant is derived ? Lev. 17 : 11-14, answers this question : " The *life of the flesh* is in the blood : and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls : for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul." Blood then, is sacrificially employed to represent life, which it is ; for withdraw the blood, and you withdraw the life of any creature. If blood represents life, then the shedding of it represents death. To pour out the blood of any thing sacrificed was to cause its death : when a worshipper approached God with the blood of a slain animal (having

placed his hand on the head of the animal before it was slain), it was a confession that before God, as a sinner, he had no right to live, seeing that "death is the wages of sin," and that death hath passed upon all men through Adam. It was in fact a typical declaration of the righteousness of God, with which God was pleased to be approached; but only typical because there was no natural connection between the slain animal and the consequences of sin; consequently, "the blood of bulls and of goats could not take away sin" (Heb. 10:4). The type pointed to the purpose of Jehovah to provide a perfect declaration of His righteousness in the shed blood of an actual wearer of the nature condemned in Adam, who should be acceptable to Him in all things, and whose resurrection could therefore follow His blood-shedding. This antitypical lamb, as we know, was the Lord Jesus, who though made in all things like unto his brethren as regards mortality of nature on account of sin, was himself absolutely free from sin in his own character. Here was the Lamb of God without spot or blemish, and yet a suitable sacrifice in the possession of the very nature which had come under condemnation, because of sin in the beginning. In the shedding of his blood, there was a "declaration of the righteousness of God" (Rom. 3:25, 26). He was not destined to return to dust: it was therefore necessary that his blood should be spilt and that death should follow, as the ceremonial declaration of Jehovah's righteousness in the public condemnation of sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3)—as a basis for the offer of free pardon to all who should recognize the declaration, and identify themselves with it, and come unto God with confession and faith in the name of the crucified Jesus, as the one great sacrifice through which alone man can acceptably approach God.

In view of all these things, it is evident what force there is in the words with which Jesus introduced the memorial cup to the notice of his disciples: "This is the new covenant in my blood, shed for many for the remission of sins." The new covenant or agreement, which ensures coming blessedness to the fallen sons of Adam, is in the blood of Christ and nowhere else. There can be no blessedness without covenant, because, apart from the addition of special covenant on the part of God, who only has the power to bestow blessedness, we are shut up to what we have by nature, and that is, a poor mortal body that will wear out in due course, and disappear in death. And there can be no covenant without sacrifice, for so has God willed, and we can no more get past His will in this matter than we can alter the constitution of heaven and earth. And there is no sacrifice but one with which we can approach God for covenant, and that is the one great sacrifice accomplished in Christ. And there is no way of becoming associated with that sacrifice but by enlightenment in the promises on which the covenant is established, and faith in the blood in which it is offered, and legal contact with that blood in baptism, which is the divinely appointed mode of association with the death of Christ. The root of the whole matter lies first in the greatness, and then in the goodness of God. God is a great and

SEASONS OF COMFORT

dreadful majesty, to whom the earth and all flesh belong, for He has made them out of His own energy. He is not only great, but He is holy, and jealous of His supremacy. He has been disobeyed on earth, and has in consequence given us over to death ; and will not be approached by us except in the manner He has appointed. But He is good, and He will forgive and bestow everlasting life if we humble ourselves and come to Him in the way appointed. The way appointed is through the shed blood of a perfectly righteous wearer of our nature, in whom sin was condemned on our account. He will forgive us if we come in this way : not because that blood-shedding pacifies Him, or gives Him anything, or pays any debt ; for then it would be no forgiveness—but because His righteousness is declared, and His prerogative recognized, and our position acknowledged in the acceptance of the slain lamb of His appointing.

We endorse and proclaim all these glorious things every time we take this cup into our hand and drink it, and say “ Amen ! ” at the giving of thanks for “ the new covenant in the blood of Christ shed for the remission of sins.” This breaking of bread signifies our acceptance of God’s ways, and is a testimony to the world that they have no hope outside of this way. We find great comfort in this way ourselves, and we would extend that comfort ; but we find many obstacles in the imaginations and high thoughts that exalt themselves against the knowledge of God (2 Cor. 10 : 5). We have even earned the bitterest odium it is possible for men to bear—the reputation of being illiberal, and uncharitable, and narrow minded, and bigoted—because we maintain the teaching of Christ and his apostles on this vital matter. What can we do but accept the result with resignation ? It is a result that has always more or less attended the testimony of the truth. It is no new thing for “ the preaching of the cross ” to be productive of offence. Paul speaks of it in his letters. He says the preaching of the cross was to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness. He accepted the reproach incident to such a situation ; he refused to glory in anything save the cross of our Lord Jesus. We are in the best of company when we are in the company of Paul, and we are undoubtedly in his company when we are accused by the modern Greeks (the scientists of every grade) of being behind the age and badly informed, and old fogy and sectarian ; and by the Jews, of being worse than the Christians in the rigidness of our insistence on the original teachings of Christ ; and by Christians, of being gloomy retrogressionists, the slaves of a dead letter, and strangers to the broad life and charity and the true spirit of the gospel. To each and all, we can but say, “ We accept Christ because he rose from the dead ; and we accept the apostles, because we accept Christ ; and we accept the New Testament writings as the standard of truth, because we accept the apostles ; and we challenge you all to deny that the conclusions which we maintain are the teachings of these writings. It would be pleasant to come on to your broad platform and to join in your charitable spirit and to share your freedom from the narrowness and restraint that undoubtedly hamper the profession of the gospel, as originally delivered, as

regards the present evil world. We should have your pleasant society, and your encouraging recognition, and your advantageous patronage, and your general enjoyment of the broad fields of human culture, and pleasure, and good fellowship. But wherein should we be the gainers in the day when Christ arrives to sweep away the present order of things, and to re-organize affairs in harmony with divine principles only, and to give glorious place in his house to those only who do the will of his Father, as written in his revealed word of truth? We should have a poor staff to lean on, in a respectable world which will then dissolve in terror before his face. No: we have made Christ our portion, and for better or worse, we will accept the isolation and the odium that result, confident that experience shortly to be apparent, will justify an uncompromising adherence to the written word as the only enlightened policy that can be pursued."

"Until He Come"

Suggestiveness in these words to the first generation of believers.—Many of them had seen Christ.—Been much in his company.—Had seen him ascend visibly.—We have not seen.—Some had to be in our position.—A special blessedness.—More numerous reasons for looking for his appearing.—Converging indications supplied by the Lord himself.—Intended to afford a clue.—Past generations of believers all exercised the same way.—Full of expectation that the Lord would soon appear.—A fuller knowledge.—An extensive programme.—Strange that premature expectation could be indulged in, in view of the periods of Daniel. The explanation.—Modern times.—The disappearance of Papal coercive power.—Emancipation of the Jews.—The hour of Christ's return at hand.—Good the exact time has not been revealed.—The absence of sensationalism.—The interest created twenty-five years ago.—The present circle.—Lamps gone out.—Watching and preparing.—"In such an hour as ye think not."—The parable of the ten virgins.—The "wise" and the oil vessels abundantly supplied.—Vessels empty, unfurnished for the Lord's coming.—"Too late."—Manifestly but one safe course.—"Walk with God."—The assembly of his people.—Whole affairs dedicated to the Lord.—A waiting stewardship.—Good preparing for us, the zest of realized expectations.—The dark side.—Do not give in.—The Lord a man of sorrow.—By appointment.—No accident.—We are not alone in the storm, God near.—At the end of the dark journey.—Welcome.

"As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death until he come." Such is Paul's remark concerning the institution we have assembled this morning to observe. Let us fix our attention for a few moments on the last three words, "until he come."

There must have been a suggestiveness in these words to the first generation of believers that we may fail to apprehend in our late day. The "He" of the sentence would stand before them with a vividness to which we are necessarily strangers. We have heard of Christ; but they, many of them, had seen him, and if they had not seen him, they had seen many who had, and were living so near the time when he had been on earth as to feel him a contemporary friend so to speak, whose return to them would have none of the dimness about it that the interposition of eighteen centuries is apt to make us feel. The immediate disciples of the Lord, particularly, must have enjoyed the advantage of this position. The Lord's person was as intimate a figure to them as ours to one another. They had been much in his company, had sat often at the same table, knew his deportment, were familiar with the contour of his countenance and the tones of his voice. He was to them a well-known friend, tenderly loved and deeply feared, as real and practical an object to their mind as anything under the sun. They had travelled and worked with him for a considerable time; they had communed with him in the quietness of the desert, and borne with him the jostle and inconvenience of the crowd. They had hung upon his words and marvelled at his works, and adored his bearing. They had exulted in the prospect of his kingly exaltation in Israel; they had seen him crucified; they had tasted the anguish of the grave's triumph which, though momentary, they did not know to be momentary at the time. They had experienced the gladness of seeing him alive again, and holding converse with him for the considerable period of six weeks. They had seen him, at the end of that time, ascend visibly from their midst to the right hand of power. They had received the consoling assurance: "This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go." When, therefore, they assembled round the table at the breaking of bread to "do this in remembrance" of him, "until he come," it would be with a lively interest such as is scarcely possible with us who have had no personal relation to the facts of the case.

Still, the facts of the case are not altered or diminished by our personal insulation from them. The words, "until he come," have the same force in the abstract as if we had all been personal companions of the Lord. Some had to be in our position, of loving without seeing, and it has fallen to our lot. Our business is to accept it cheerfully—yea, thankfully, and make the best of it. Consider the countless thousands who are not privileged to know Christ at all. Even as compared with the Lord's personal disciples, our position may not be one to be much dissatisfied with. The Lord seems to intimate a special blessedness for those who in the absence of personal witness, have been believing and obedient. His words to Thomas amount to this: "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed; blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed." The parable of the labourers in the vineyard, also, though relating to a different matter, bears in the same direction. The labourers last hired were first rewarded and on equal terms with the first.

The Lord's return is as much “due,” so to speak, now as at the first time the disciples broke bread together after his departure. Nay, it is more so. Many things had to happen before the disciples could hope to see him again. These have all happened so far as their general outline is concerned. In a peculiar sense, the ends of the age have gathered on our generation. More numerous are the reasons than they have ever been before, for “looking for his appearing.” We know neither the day nor the hour; but many converging indications tell us that the time is near, even at the door. The rate at which these indications are developing may be slower than we had been led to look for; but the indications themselves are clear and unmistakable. They are the indications supplied by the Lord himself, apart from which, we should, of course, have been without any clue. Having them, we have a clue. It is clear he intended us to rely on them as affording such a clue. What other meaning is there to his words: “When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh!” These “things” embrace all that has been divinely revealed as characteristic of the time of the end. Much has been revealed on this head through Daniel, Ezekiel, and other prophets, and especially through John in the Isle of Patmos. Putting it all together, we are able to recognize our time as the time of the “end” when the vision shall “speak” in a manner that all shall listen to.

We look back upon past generations of believers and see them all more or less exercised in the same way. Probably, Daniel himself had sanguine expectations that the purpose of God was soon to be consummated. His study of Jeremiah had shown him that the then prevalent desolation of Jehovah's land and people was not appointed to extend beyond seventy years. The seventy years were nearly at an end; what did he know but the promised “Branch” would spring forth from David's roots at that time, and establish the blessedness of Israel and the nations, spoken of by all the prophets in that connection? There was nothing to correct any anticipation of this sort in which he might have indulged, until he received the visions recorded in his book, showing him that the vision was “yet for many days”; that the Messiah would after a long interval be cut off, and that after him, for a long time, Gentile desolation would prevail over land and people. No wonder the ampler information turned him sick with disappointment. We know as a fact that the disciples in the days of Jesus “thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear” (Luke 19 : 11); and we know that the ecclesias of the first century were full of expectation that the Lord would soon appear, till Paul (who was more deeply instructed by visions and revelations than any of that age) wrote to the Thessalonians that certain preliminary events were indispensable. Paul did not know all, for it was not till A.D. 96 that Jesus (who received the knowledge from the Father) vouchsafed a full knowledge of the particulars. These were exhibited to John in the Isle of Patmos, and communicated by him to seven nominated ecclesias for the information of the rest. By these, they were enabled to perceive that there

SEASONS OF COMFORT

was an extensive programme of events to be accomplished in the history of the world before the time could arrive for the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdoms of Christ. But even this information was communicated in a form that allowed successive generations of believers to hope for the appearing of Christ long before the appointed time. The *Thirteen Lectures on the Apocalypse* make manifest the peculiar structure of the vision by which the end is apparently reached several times, and yet only once finally reached, when the whole of the inner sections of the vision are drawn out telescopically, one after the other. This peculiarity has led to the expectation of Christ's appearing being indulged in, apparently with good reason, by several generations of believers since the Lord's departure. It may strike you as strange that this premature expectation could be indulged in, in view of the periods of Daniel which reach down to the end of the nineteenth century ; but then, we must remember that it was expressly intimated to Daniel that the vision shown to him was "closed and sealed till the time of the end" (12 : 9). When the hand of God is upon a matter, no man can see it, however visible it may be in a natural sense. Consequently the brethren were not able to check and rectify their apocalyptically-engendered expectations by the information contained in Daniel. There was a wisdom in this which we may see. It would not have been advantageous for the brethren to know that the time was far distant. Such knowledge would have been calculated to depress and paralyse. They were, therefore, permitted to indulge in the hope of an earlier consummation of things that came within the scope of the divine purpose.

It may be suggested that we ourselves may be in a similar position. To a certain extent it has been so ; but the state of affairs in the world forbids the idea that it can be so to anything like the same extent. There are too many elements in the calculation to leave room for error in the result. There are too many concurring periods—too many separate and independent signs to make it possible that our expectations can prove as premature as those of our brethren of past ages. The entire disappearance of Papal coercive power at the time appointed ; the armed and arming state of the nations resulting from French influence and initiative ; the increasing decrepitude of the Turkish Empire ; the steady aggrandizement of the Czar of all the Russias ; the eastern overshadowing position of Britain ; the revival of the Holy Land and the emancipation of the Jews, and the many schemes for the re-union of both under British protection, make it certain that the hour of Christ's return is at hand. The only uncertainty is the exact time. This has been hidden. It was assumed that it coincided with the time appointed for the fall of the Temporal Power. Time has shown this assumption to be wrong, but it has also confirmed the general ground with which the assumption was associated, and has established the conviction immovably as to the fact of the end having arrived, and the Lord's return in a general sense being "due."

It is easy to realize that it is good the exact time of the Lord's appearing has not been revealed. Supposing it had been communi-

cated that on such a day in such a month in 18—something or other, Christ would come, a variety of evil effects must have ensued. Those living in the first and other early centuries would have been liable to feel it was a long way off, and would have lacked consequently some of the stimulus that comes with the impression that the Lord's coming is a proximate possibility at any time. In fact, all believers living more than a generation before the time must have been more or less affected in this way to their detriment. Then as regards those living when the time came near, they must have been highly exercised in a manner that would have had more of sensationalism in it than that intelligent loving faith which is the basis of acceptable service. There would have been a large crop of mere sensationalists as the time drew near, and a scanty growth of robust believers in the earlier times. There would thus have lacked that completeness in the body of Christ, which will be secured by the plan that has been adopted. It will probably be found that this plan has secured representatives of every century, so that the body of Christ will be a living epitome of human history, from Abel outside the garden of Eden, down to the believers who are found alive at the Lord's coming, busy upholding his name in the earth, watching the signs, and looking for his appearing.

The absence of sensationalism, and unexpected lapses, have had the effect of winnowing believers, and leaving those only whose adhesion is based upon sound principles of the truth independently of the mere transient phases of things involved in the signs of the times. We have seen this even in our own day, and it is in our own day perhaps that we are more particularly interested. Some of us can look back to the interest created by the signs of the times twenty-five years ago, and as we look round upon the present circle, we can think of one and another who have wearied in the attitude of waiting for the salvation of God, and surrendered to the secular influences that bear upon every one. Their lamps have gone out. They have been overcome of the world. Even those who have withstood the trying effects of apparent delay experience some of the quietude that comes with hope deferred. They are not so easily elated with the signs of the times. They rejoice in the general drift of things but they are prepared to wait. There is a danger of this mood going too far. Patience may degenerate to indifference. A middle ground is the ground pointed out by reason—looking for the Lord, watching the signs, and preparing for his coming by acting the part of his servants.

Jesus said, “In such an hour as ye think not, the Son of man cometh.” This was certainly true as regarded the expectation of those whom he addressed, for they had no idea that the events lay eighteen hundred years from their day. But it may have an application in the closing scene. The delay, if further prolonged, may have the effect of engendering a feeling that the Lord's coming is out of all calculation, and may lead many to resign themselves to secular aims. There may be a lull in the development of events to favour this tendency—to give emphasis to this trial. At such a time—“at such an hour as we think not”—when some may have made up their minds that the Son of Man is a long way off, he may be proclaimed

SEASONS OF COMFORT

in our midst. The parable of the ten virgins, though having a wider scope, may find an illustration in this closing episode: "They all slumbered and slept." "And at midnight, there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him." Though all involved in the general slumber, as regards the attitude of attention and eager watchfulness, there is a great difference between the different sections of the same class. The "wise" have "oil in their vessels"; and at the summons, it is a mere question of getting the lamps into burning form, but the "foolish" are without oil, and cannot light their lamps. It requires no recondite exposition to make the meaning of this apparent. We all know that light, as a scriptural figure, represents the enlightenment that results from the indwelling of the truth. The oil from which this light is combusted, is the instruction contained in the Holy Oracles. With this oil, the wise have their vessels abundantly supplied, consequent on their obedience to the precept which tells them to let the word of Christ dwell in them richly. Whatever lack of success there may be in the public tokens of the Lord's coming, their love of Jehovah's testimonies in their daily readings is like David's. The foolish, on the contrary, have neglected the daily reading and study of the Scriptures, and find their vessels empty on the arrival of the crisis in which only visible signs interested them. Their minds are a blank and a waste in divine things. Having given themselves up to the present evil world, its literature, its pleasures, its honours, its friendships, and its pursuits—they find themselves unfurnished for the relation of things which the Lord's coming introduces. They make a great and frantic endeavour to get into a state of readiness. "Too late" is the only suitable response to their excited appeals. Spiritual preparedness for the Lord's coming is not a thing that can be hurried up in a moment. It is a state reached by a process of growth, and that process is indicated by Peter when he says, "As new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby."

What shall we say in view of these things? There is manifestly but one safe course. Whatever phase public events may assume, favourable or unfavourable, as we may construe them, let us "walk with God," in the close adherence to the reading and meditation of his word which becomes increasingly precious as time hurries past, and the vanity of all mortal things becomes the more and more apparent. Let us concurrently with this, addict ourselves to the assembly of his people, and to all those activities that have to do with the publication and the honour of his name, and the development and service of his people. In this line of things, we shall be fortified to endure any amount of waiting. We shall be prepared to wait. The waiting will sit lightly when our whole affairs are dedicated to the Lord, and used as the means and occasion of a waiting stewardship. We shall even see that waiting is good. It is good in so far as it is preparing for us the zest of realized expectations. It is one of the principal elements of the joy of the coming salvation—that it has been waited for. It is a feature expressly mentioned in the prophets—"It shall be said in that day, Lo, this our God; we have waited for

him . . . We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” How much greater our gladness will be than if we had not to wait ; we can realize this if we compare our feelings now, after having waited and been made to appreciate and to long for what God has promised. Suppose it had come the year before we were enlightened, how totally unprepared we should have been. Therefore our waiting has a bright side : of course it is the dark side that we most readily feel. The weariness of the delay—the burden of “ this tabernacle ” which cleaves to the earth—the mental depression arising from the spectacle of so much evil around us—are all liable to weigh us heavily to the earth, and make us groan. Do not give in too much to the dejection. Do not think that “ some strange thing has happened to you.” Remember it has been the experience of all the saints. Even David, as we find in the psalm this morning, has to rally himself on the subject. He had to ask himself, “ Why art thou cast down, O my soul ? Why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou in God ; for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance.” Paul also, in the chapter read from Romans, exclaims, “ O wretched man that I am ! ” What also means the testimony concerning the Lord that he was a man of sorrow, but this, that cloud and sadness are the normal experience of this probationary time ? True, there is an “ always rejoicing ” associated with it as an undercurrent. Still, sorrow has the larger place. It is by appointment. It is no accident. Yea, it is the inevitable adjunct of a state and a time when mankind is not in friendship with God. Let us recognize the fact. It makes its endurance easier than if we carry our burden with the idea that things ought to be different. Let us never give in. Let us bravely breast the dark billows. Let us remember that we are not alone in the storm. God is near us all the time ; and what time our spirit is overwhelmed, let us fly unto him, whom David well describes as the Rock that is higher than we. He maketh light to arise in the darkness for the upright even now. He will not put upon us more than we are able to bear. After we have suffered a while, He will establish, strengthen, settle—even now. And at the end of the dark journey, there waits a welcome whose sweetness and joy it hath not entered into our hearts to conceive..

The Cup Of The Blessing

The significance of the cup.—A further remark which the Lord made.—Remark having a future bearing.—“I will not henceforth” do this.—Never be again at all?—Social intercourse resumed.—“I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”—His meaning plain.—He will do again what he did then in a literal manner.—A literal act blending with it an emblematic significance.—Drinking with the Lord in the day of his glory, sharing his position, his throne, his immortality and his joy.—Some people have a difficulty.—The bias of orthodox religion.—Christ, a bright “shade.”—Wine would fall through it.—Part of the ghostism of popular theology.—Christ a real Christ.—Flesh and bones.—An immortal strong man.—The act of eating.—Incongruous to some.—What need for an immortal to eat?—There is an answer.—Present observations of nature would forbid narrow conclusions.—The spiritual body.—Assimilates food to the last grain of substance.—Reducing all substance to its first element, spirit.—A source of delight far surpassing the gratification of the animal palate.—The highest act of fellowship.—Eat and drink in the glorious company of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.—Not one sitting down but all the sittings down.—The gladness of a living union with Christ.—Gloom but an episode in earth’s history.—Weeping endures but for a night.—Songs with the morning.—The cup of salvation filled to the brim.—Now a cup of blood-shedding.—Then the symbol of pure joy.—Times and seasons of festal intercourse.—Intervals of separation and work.—No fag, work a pleasure.—A glorious prospect.—No cunningly devised fable.

OUR meeting this morning we rightly speak of as “the breaking of bread,” but did we break bread only, we should not observe the ordinance as it had been appointed of the Lord. There is “the cup of blessing,” as well as “the bread which we break” (1 Cor. 10 : 16). We drink wine as well as eat bread in commemoration of “the Lord’s death until he come.” The significance of the cup is briefly expressed in the Lord’s description of it when he appointed the drinking of it : “the new covenant in my blood.” We have recently considered the meaning of this description. We will not go over the ground again, although the subject would not suffer from reconsideration. We will rather dwell for a moment on this occasion on a further remark which the Lord made concerning the cup, following whithersoever it may profitably lead us.

He said, “I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt. 26 : 29). Here is a remark having a future bearing. As such it cannot fail to contain much that is of deep interest to those who shall be gathered with the apostles in the day of the kingdom of God. What is the meaning of it? It might seem that this ought not to be far to seek. Jesus had a cup of wine in his hand when he spoke. It was the last time he was to eat and drink in a familiar way with his

disciples in the flesh. He had often done it before. In fact, so distinctly sociable was Jesus in this respect, that it gave his enemies occasion to speak of him as "a gluttonous man and a wine bibber," in contrast with John, who was of abstemious habits. But now the time had come when there would be no more of this condescension on the part of Christ, and this wonderful privilege on the part of those with whom he ate and drank. "I will not henceforth" do this : or, as Mark says, "I will drink *no more* of the fruit of the vine." But was it never to be again at all? Were the disciples never more to have the pure social delight of sitting at the same table with the Lord Jesus? If Jesus crucified had remained among the dead, the question might be in some doubt, but seeing that Jesus rose, and that the disciples are to be raised by him also (John 6 : 39), what more inevitable than the conclusion that social intercourse will be resumed when they meet in one body as appointed? This conclusion would stand on strong ground without express intimation on the subject ; but what else can we think when we hear him say, "I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, *until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God*"? (Mark 14 : 25). Especially when we take this in connection with Christ's declaration to the disciples after the supper : "I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me ; that ye may *eat and drink at my table in my kingdom*" (Luke 22 : 28-30). It might be easy to argue a figurative meaning for these words. Christ's words might be quoted : "These things I have spoken to you in parables" (John 16 : 25), and illustrations of parabolic use would not be difficult to cite, such as, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst : but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4 : 14), and again, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2 : 19). The argument would merely show that Christ did speak often in parables or proverbs. It would not disprove the plainness of his meaning where that is evident. That his meaning is plain in the case before us will not be denied—cannot be denied in harmony with the facts. Jesus was eating the passover—a literal act. Having finished this literal act, he performed another literal act. He took bread—literal bread, and wine—literal wine, and ate and drank with his disciples in a literal manner with a spiritual meaning which he explained ; and he says, "I will no more" do *this*, until you sit "with me at my table in my kingdom." What can this mean but that he will do again, when he meets his disciples in the kingdom, what he did then—eat bread and drink wine, and the passover also, with them in a literal manner? There is no contradiction to this in the fact that the blessings to be provided for the nations of the earth in that blessed age are spoken of as a feast of "wines on the lees well refined" (Isa. 25 : 6). The figurative does not exclude the literal. The literal is the basis of the figurative. If there were no literal, there could be no figurative. Often they go together in one and the same act or phrase, as when it is said of a king that he holds the sceptre or wears the crown. The breaking of bread is a literal

SEASONS OF COMFORT

act which blends with it the significance which the Lord has associated with it now—the memorial of his death, the fellowship of his sufferings on our part. But the promise that we shall eat and drink with him at his table in his kingdom is to be taken as a statement of what will literally take place, comprehending in itself, however, all the significance which that literal act will carry with it. Who could literally eat and drink with the Lord in the day of his glory without sharing also of his position, his throne, his immortality, and his joy? To do the one implies the inheriting of the other. Therefore the statement of the one takes the other with it as a matter of meaning. The literal eating and drinking by itself would be a poor affair to make the subject of promise; but as taking with it the sharing of his friendship, the participation of his glory, the enjoyment of his love and fellowship, the inheritance of his throne, and his glorious immortal nature, it becomes a very great and precious promise indeed without abating a jot of its literalness.

Some people have a difficulty in receiving the idea that Christ and his people will literally eat and drink together in the kingdom. Perhaps some who believe the truth may experience this difficulty. Such a difficulty is due to the bias inherited from orthodox religion. According to this religion, it is a matter of impossibility that Christ should drink wine again. Its idea of Christ excludes it. This idea perhaps is not very definite. So far as it can be defined, it may be expressed in the phrase, a spectral Christ—a bright “shade,” a luminous form of human shape without substance or tangibility—a something that could not drink wine. The wine would fall through it, as through a sunbeam. This idea of Christ is totally foreign to the Scriptures. It is part of the ghostism of popular theology. Popular theology makes man an immortal ghost to be saved, and therefore conceives of its saviour after the same manner. But the Scriptures show us man a body, as we find him to be, and they give us in Christ a real Christ, a Christ of flesh and bones, who can be handled, who can exhibit marks of bodily identity, and who can eat (Luke 24 : 38-43)—all this after his resurrection; a Christ as real as he with whom the disciples walked and talked and kept company for three years and a half—yea more real, for as Christ was then, he was a weak and a mortal Christ, a Christ who was of the seed of David according to the flesh, made in all points like unto his brethren (Rom. 1 : 3 ; Heb. 2 : 16). But as he now is, he is an immortal strong man, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2 : 9), one in whose substance is focally condensed the power from which creation has sprung.

Realizing this view of Christ, it is an easy matter to receive what he has promised, that we shall eat and drink with him at his table in his kingdom. Some may feel affected just the other way. They may reason that if Christ is glorious and real and immortal, the act of eating seems the more incongruous because it has to do with the sustaining of life, and is associated with the phenomenon of corruption. They may ask, what need for an immortal to eat? what place in an incorruptible body for a process involving chemical decomposition?

There is an answer. First, we must not govern possibility by our experience. The works of God are without measure, and without limit in their diversity. It does not follow that because we depend upon eating for living that therefore the act of eating has no higher function in higher organizations. It does not follow that because eating is associated with corruption in our experience, that therefore corruption is a corollary of eating in whatever nature of body that act takes place. Even our present observations of nature would forbid narrow conclusions on the subject. We see even now that the power of chemically absorbing the elements of food is in proportion to the electrical and functional vigour of the constitution. An enfeebled organization will scarcely take half the nutriment out of the food, while a powerful organization will absorb it pretty completely, and reject but a small residuum. Is it impossible to conceive of an absolutely complete absorption? It is evident that there is an ascending scale of power in this respect in even the animal organization of present experience; and by analogy, it is a matter of irresistible conclusion that in the spiritual body which is powerful (Cor. 15 : 43), this power exists in perfection, and can assimilate food to the last grain of substance without a remnant for corruption. We must remember that all substance is spirit at the root; for out of God all things have come, and in Him they subsist. What we call matter is His energy made concrete in limited forms and conditions according to His wisdom. Consequently, a spiritual body will presumably possess the functional capacity of reducing all substance to its first element, spirit, and assimilating food to its own spirit nature, possessed by the eater. This excludes the very idea of corruption, and at the same time, it preserves to us the act of eating without the association of corruption which belongs to present experience. Eating in the spiritual nature will therefore be not merely a possibility, but probably a source of delight of which dull animal organisms know little: for the act of converting food, not into blood but into spirit itself will probably yield a sensation of pleasure as far surpassing the gratification of the animal palate as the spiritual body exceeds the animal body in life, glory, and power. Such a view of the case enables us to realize the act of eating and drinking in the spirit state as the occasion of much spiritual joy and friendship among those who partake together. Even now the act of eating together is the highest act of fellowship, and the occasion of the most refined enjoyment of which the human mind is capable, all other things being equal. How much more must this be the case when weakness is eliminated, and when therefore there will be an absence of the many drawbacks to social enjoyment arising in the present state from feebleness in every function.

But finally, even if we were unable to see a satisfactory philosophy of the matter, we should not be justified in shutting our eyes to the testimony of God. It is Christ's parting promise that we shall eat and drink with him in the glorious company of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the precious section of mankind of which they are the heads. On this promise we may rest, as embracing in itself every

SEASONS OF COMFORT

good thing appertaining to the great salvation. It does not mean one sitting down, nor any particular sitting down, nor any sitting down as a mere ceremony ; but all the intercourse one with another, that wisdom and love may call for in the glorious fellowship to be established among immortal saints in the age to come. It means the day of gladness that awaits the sons of God, gladness such as they can never know in the flesh ; the gladness of a living union with Christ—a living union with God ; not a union by faith, but of actual, manifest, and exhilaratingly-experienced fact. We do not know what gladness is now. We have never tasted the real joys of existence. It is with difficulty that we pull ourselves along, by reason of our own weakness, physically and mentally, and by reason of the coldness and the darkness of the present evil world. But joy is appointed nevertheless. It waits. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." God never purposed that gloom should always reign : the gloom is but an episode in earth's history. It is incidental to the advent of sin ; it is the corollary of the reign of Death. It is inevitable while the tabernacle of God as yet is not with men. "Everlasting joy" is the end of the matter. The weeping endures but for a night ; songs come with the morning, and the morning comes with Christ ; who gives his people their first taste of the unspeakable joy of the ages to come, by effusing upon them that wonderful power of the Spirit which in a moment will change the body of their humiliation into that glorious nature which, among other delights, will be capable of the joy of sitting down to eat and drink with Christ. They will be the subject of glorious nuptials to the strains of heavenly music, and surrounded and upborne by the ineffable comfort of angelic attendance.

In that glorious day of comfort and gladness, the cup will be once more on the table, but with a different meaning. Christ will drink it *new* in the kingdom of God. It will be the cup of salvation, the cup of joy and rejoicing—filled to the brim. Now it is a cup of blood-shedding, a cup of suffering and death—a cup of blessing truly, because of the blessedness opened to us by its means, but still a cup pregnant with a significance of evil, speaking to us of sin and affliction and the triumph of the wicked. Then it will be the symbol of pure joy and the centre of a ceremony having a thrilling interest for the vast assembly that will surround the Lord Jesus on the day of the new celebration, when he will fulfil the psalm which says : "I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. O Lord, truly I am thy servant ; I am thy servant, and the son of thine handmaid : thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people." And again : "The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous : the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore : but he hath not given me over

unto death. Open to me the gates of righteousness : I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord. This gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter . . . This is the day which the Lord hath made ; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord . . . send now prosperity” (Psa. 116 : 13-18 ; 118 : 15-25).

The rejoicing of the righteous here depicted will not be a perpetual session ; it will not be an everlasting sitting down of the literal sort, as some are apt to imagine. There will be literal sittings down, and many of them ; but God is a God of order in all things. For everything there is a season and a time. There will be times and seasons of festal intercourse ; but times and seasons also of more practical service—intervals of separation and work—pleasant work—the work of ruling the nations—the work of instructing the people—the work of administering justice among the inhabitants of the earth—each saint in his own particular district—over his own particular “ ten cities ” or “ five cities ”—for which there will be ample qualification in the possession of a spirit nature. In this nature there will be no weariness ; work will be a pleasure. And there will be no error of judgment ; what is true of the head will be true of the whole ruling body of Christ. “ He shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears. . . . The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him ; the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord ; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord ” (Isa. 11).

What a glorious prospect. Look at it and feast your eyes and heart upon it. It is no cunningly-devised fable. It is not the conception of any human brain. Though so gorgeous, it is the picture plainly and soberly placed before us in the gospel. Men in the weariness of constant disappointment may whisper or shout that it is “ too good to be true ” ; but wise men will remember that weariness and weakness are conditions of the present transient state only. They are not the standard by which the purpose of the wisdom that made all things is to be measured. They will pass away. God, the strength of all, remains ; and His mighty purpose will prevail at the last, and fill every waiting, sorrowful, obedient soul with gladness. Christ is our hope. He is God’s pledge to us of the glory to be revealed. We call him to mind, and thank God with all our hearts for him, while we take this cup into our hands, concerning which he has said, “ I will drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

The Sure Foundation

The foundation laid.—No decay.—Other foundation can no man lay.—The ground turns to quagmire ; the stones turn to sand.—We have accepted God's foundation.—We have accepted Christ ; will Christ accept us?—" Many " in that day will claim admittance.—A mass of suppliants.—Who will be chosen?—Him that is godly.—Godliness in God's estimation.—Be not concerned about anybody else's estimation.—Godliness as popularly conceived.—As displayed to us in the Scriptures.—The root of the matter : God Himself.—God speaking, and speaking for the glory of His name.—Moses.—God in the Mosaic system.—The new covenant invites men to a closer relation to God.—" Now the sons of God."—In friendship with God.—Godliness as distinct from manliness.—Man's behaviour to man, and man's behaviour to God.—God's examples of the man that is Godly.—Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and last and greatest of all, the Lord Jesus.—Their leading characteristic.—Concern for the will of God.—Sermons or popular lectures on religious subjects.—Ungodliness without people perhaps knowing it.—The offensiveness of the truth.—Its insistence on what God has appointed.—Noah.—His belief in God.—His obedience to the commandments delivered.—The world does not believe in godliness but in manliness.—Abraham.—The God-fearing, God-obeying man.—Moses conspicuous for the place he gave to God.—The diluted and impoverished godliness of this corrupt age.—Not sure of the personality of the Deity.—The God of Israel.—A personal God, kernel of the universe.—The Father of our Lord Jesus.—Faith in him.—No human invention.

It is a long time since the foundation was laid on which we stand in hope this morning ; but there has been no decay in that foundation. There can be no decay in it. " Man decays and ages move," but " the foundation of the Lord standeth sure." Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid—Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and for ever. Men may disregard this foundation and try to lay foundations of their own, but what can come of their efforts but disappointment and dismay ? They cannot find a bottom that will stay sound and secure ; they cannot find materials that will hold together for any length of time. The ground turns to quagmire ; their stones turn to sand. Time wrecks their best efforts, destroys their highest hopes. " Man dieth, and wasteth away : yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he ? " Who can bring a man from the grave ? Who can give hope in death ? The living are indifferent, whom the question concerns, and the dead know not anything. Men play with the question till the time is past. They fritter away their strength in fancies, in criminal negligence of the fact that God has given His answer and laid his foundation, than which there is no other for the children of men.

We are here this morning, because we have accepted this foundation. We do not boast of it ; we are thankful for it ; but we must

assert it, and declare it, and contend for it ; that away from the Christ preached by Paul, there is no hope, and that away from the ordinances delivered by his hand, men hope in vain to please God. Our particular business this morning, however is to rejoice in the hope, and at the same time to realize wherein we must be careful that we come not short of our hope, and wherein we must mix trembling with our mirth. The day of salvation will be a day of pure rejoicing, a day of unmixed gladness—gladness without precaution or reserve. But we have not come so far yet. As yet we listen to Paul's exhortation : " Let us therefore fear, lest "—lest we fail.

We have accepted Christ ; will Christ accept us ? This is a question that it is Christ's prerogative alone to answer. Nevertheless, we may profitably discuss it, because the principles by which his choice will be determined, have been abundantly revealed. In our day, people are accustomed to think that it is sufficient if we accept Christ ; that, in fact, we do Christ a favour, so to speak, in allowing ourselves to be saved. It is true that Christ has said (and we may rejoice greatly in his words), " Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out," but there is a great deal more in the " coming " than most people realize. It means much more humility, much more anxiety, much more earnestness, much more ardour than would satisfy a modern clergyman. Christ speaks of " many " who will " come to him in that day " anxious to be saved, who will claim admittance to his kingdom and rehearse the grounds of their claim in the " wonderful works " done in his name. They " come " to Christ in a sense, but not in the right sense, and they will be cast out (for so Christ says), although he had said in the other case that he would in no wise cast out the man coming to him.

There will be a mass of suplicants for the favour of Christ when it is found he is in the earth, and that all judgment is in his hands. The suplicants are few now, although the fact of all judgment being in his hands is testified. A question that anxiously concerns all men is, who among the mass of claimants for his favour will be chosen ? We may find and meditate on the answer contained in a very simple and yet comprehensive declaration by the Spirit in David : " The Lord hath chosen him that is godly for himself." *Him that is godly.* Here is something to consider. How shall we know " him that is godly " ? How shall we learn what is meant by the words ? We may know in one way only. God has not left us without instruction as to what constitutes godliness in His estimation. We need not be concerned about anybody else's estimation. We shall waste our time in bootless search if we try to find out among the generality of men what entitles a man to be described by the words " him that is godly." The idea of godliness has in our generation evaporated to next to nothing. It is almost an obsolete term ; and where it is not obsolete, it is used to describe a state of mind, totally different from the godliness known to the writings of Moses, the prophets, and the apostles. Godliness is popularly conceived to be a sentimentalized state of mind in which a man, benevolently inclined, believes in a supreme being, and is in a general way

SEASONS OF COMFORT

disposed to have some regard to questions of right or wrong. Such a man need not have very definite ideas about God ; he need not have any theory of futurity or of duty ; he need not be encumbered with any ardent convictions on such topics one way or other. He need not even be sure about a supreme being. Provided he is kindly and honest, interested in "goodness," and prepared to be charitable in the sense of allowing that all men may be in the right, and that nothing is particularly wrong, he is a godly man according to the attenuated sense of the term as now current.

Fortunately we are under no need to seek our cue from modern traditions on the subject. God has given us His idea of godliness in a way we cannot mistake. He has given it to us in the best of all ways ; in a variety of long exemplifications. We may see it first in the two dispensations of His will that have been most prominently displayed before men. We have a New Testament and an Old Testament ; a first covenant and a second. We look at these two systems as they are in themselves—as they are displayed to us in the Scriptures (and not as they are conceived by moderns, whether teachers or taught). They are both divine, and the only divine systems of godliness ever extant upon earth. And what do we find ? That God is on their forefront with a brightness almost blinding. They are not systems of morality—systems of "goodness" as understood in our day ; not systems of human behaviour, but systems of divine worship and service. They are not concerned with philosophy or science or learning—terms that after all only define the partial and very small way in which limited aspects of eternal truth impress the shallow mind of man. They go to the root of the matter : they bring God before us—God Himself—God, the Creator, God, the Father ; God the eternal and archetypal personal intelligence of whom the physical universe is but the expression in His attributes of power and wisdom. Take God from these systems, and scarcely anything would be left. The precepts for human behaviour are but the minor rays of the sun that blazes upon us in these revelations. The nature of both (which are yet one, for the second is a development from, and the complement of, the first) is condensed into that grand opening sentence of the Hebrews : "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." God speaking, and speaking for the glory of His Name ; this is the characteristic of the old and new covenants. This is manifest at a glance.

We speak of "the Mosaic economy" ; but we speak not quite accurately when we speak thus. The Mosaic element was but an instrumentality—a poor, trembling instrumentality in the case. Moses left to himself would never have troubled Israel or the world with the law that bears his name. He was contented with the quiet life of a shepherd in Midian. God appeared to him ; God sent him on an errand which was opposed to his inclinations. God sent him to Pharaoh to demand the liberation of His people. God wrought wonders in Egypt to enforce this deliverance. God

brought them out by Moses. God opened the Red Sea for them ; God led them into the wilderness. God manifested Himself to the whole nation at Sinai ; God gave them a law from thence ; and the very first clause in the first enunciation of that law was the declaration of his God-head and the demands of Israel's worship. God gave them a constitution ; and the central idea of that constitution was God ; God in their midst in the tabernacle of testimony ; God to be approached in sacrifice on the morning and evening of every day ; God to be continually remembered in the private intercourse of families, in the writing of the law on the door posts, and in the presentation of offerings in connection with almost every incident of domestic life ; God to be honoured in periodical public festivals—to be brought to mind in the passover, to be thanked in the offering of the first fruits, to be praised in the feast of tabernacles—and to be feared and worshipped on the great day of atonement. Every public and private institute of the Mosaic system was designed to bring God before the mind of Israel, and Israel into the attitude of fear and worship.

And how is it with the new covenant ? Is the image of God any less distinct in the teaching of Christ ? Is it not rather more visible, and more full, and more forward, if that be possible ? It invites men to a closer relation to God than the law established—"no more a servant, but a son." This is a change that develops God more distinctly to those who are the subjects of it. It is the feature visible in the entire system. Christ himself comes to us as the manifestation of the Father for purposes of reconciliation. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." "We pray you," says Paul, "be ye *reconciled to God.*" To those accepting the reconciliation, the proposal is made, "I will receive you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters." Those so received—all who believed and obeyed the gospel—are said to "have fellowship with the Father" ; are "now the sons of God," whose appointed part it is to be "followers of God as dear children," and who, symbolically, are said to have the "Father's name written in their foreheads." They are in friendship with God—a mighty distinction though "it doth not *yet* appear" what it involves.

This is a very different system from the poor morality to which popular tradition has reduced so-called "Christianity." It is a system of *godliness* as distinct from what may be considered as *manliness*. Popular Christianity is an affair of man's behaviour to man : the genuine thing, while it includes man's behaviour to man, is more a matter of man's behaviour to God. Does a man know God ? Does he love Him ? Does he obey Him ? Does he serve Him ? These are the questions that determine a man's relation to godliness of the only true sort. The man of whom "Yes" can be said in answer to these questions, is the man that is godly, and God "hath chosen him that is godly for himself."

God has given us examples of the man that is godly. There are many of them in the Scriptures. If we desire to be in the category, let us study them and conform to them. Glance this morning at

leading specimens. There are Abel, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and last and greatest of all, the Lord Jesus. These are all "men that are godly" after the divine pattern; and *there is no other true pattern*. What is their leading characteristic? Is it not this—their concern for the will of God? their recognition of God, their love of God, their zeal for Him? Abel pleased God by his faithful rendering of what was required. Cain brought the fruits of the field. We cannot please God by our own contrivances. We must do as He appoints. In this matter, we must heed well the admonition, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding." Our day is a day of men leaning to their own understanding. You cannot listen to a sermon or popular lecture on religious subjects without being made to feel that men have practically repudiated the obligation to submit to divine appointments, and rest wholly on their own conceptions of what is right, and true. This is ungodliness without people perhaps knowing it. There is no greater ungodliness than non-compliance with what God has required. This was the sin of Adam that brought death into the world: it was the sin of Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, who were told to kindle their censers from the fire burning on the altar, but who thought any fire would do, and paid with their lives on the spot for their careless dealing in divine matters. It will be found to be the great crime of this generation when the Lord comes to administer Jehovah's vengeance. The offensiveness of the truth to our contemporaries lies chiefly in its insistence on what God has appointed. We are despised of our neighbours because we maintain that except a man believe the gospel preached by the apostles, and submit to baptism, and continue in the observance of all things that the Lord has appointed, he cannot be saved. We have no choice in the matter. We do not like the scorn, but we must accept it if we can only escape it by joining in the universal rejection of the divine appointments.

Take Noah as a specimen of a godly man. What did his godliness chiefly consist of? His belief in God and what God said, and his obedience of the commandments delivered to him. "Moved with fear, he prepared an ark to the saving of his house," so Paul says (Heb. 11:7), and by this, he adds, "he (Noah) condemned the world, and became *heir of the righteousness which is by faith*." His action condemned the world: it was a foolish action to build a ship on dry land, but it was done at the divine command, and with an object in view—to escape the coming flood. Had he not believed in the coming flood, he would not have built the ark; but believing it he did, and therefore silently condemned the world in what he did. So it is with the gospel now: we do things that are foolish in themselves; we do them because God has commanded them, and for a reason—because we believe in the testified coming judgment and salvation: and our actions silently condemn the world, and therefore the world hates us. Do we not also, like Noah, become "*heirs of the righteousness which is by faith*"? The world does not believe in this species of righteousness. In a word, it does not believe in godliness. It believes in manliness: it believes in keeping your hand out of your

neighbour's pocket, but as for pleasing God by having faith in His word, it is an entire stranger to this idea. Lamentable aberration ! The storm will rectify the atmosphere.

Abraham—how appears he as a godly man ? Not so much as a man of neighbourly urbanities, though he was all that, as every godly man is in the truest form. It is more as the God-fearing, God-obeying man that Abraham is portrayed. The word of God finds him among his kindred and commands him to leave them : “ Get thee out of thy country and from thy father's house, into a land that I will show thee.” By faith, Abraham obeys this command, breaks up his home, and departs to a strange country, not knowing whither he goes. In the land of his pilgrimage, we find him building altars and worshipping God, who appears to him. Jehovah commands him, “ Walk *before me* and be thou perfect.” “ I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” God makes great and precious promises to him, and “ Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.” God is in Abraham's godliness, first and last. He knows God, loves God, believes God. Further, he obeys him under the severest test. God orders the sacrifice of Isaac, in whom he had said Abraham's seed should be called. If ever there was reason for hesitation, it was in such a case when obedience seemed to stultify God's own words ; but Abraham hesitated not a moment, but in obedient docility proceeded to comply with the divine direction. And Jesus says, we are Abraham's seed if we do the works of Abraham.

Moses stands conspicuous for the place he gave to God in his regard, his fears, and his compliances. Paul tells us he was “ faithful to him that appointed him.” David also, “ the man after God's own heart,” was like him, in placing God always before his face, and yearning towards Him with supreme desire, and trembling at His word and appointments. And who can think of Jesus without realizing in him the completest concentration of this living sense of the living God of Israel, his Father, whose exhibition he was to the House of Israel.

“ The man that is godly ” is illustrated in all these instances. Let us accept them and ponder them, and imitate them. Let us disown the diluted and impoverished godliness of this corrupt age. It is a godliness that has no God in it. You may find professors of it who have doubts as to the personal God of Israel. They will tell you they believe in a Supreme Being, but as to the personality of God, they are not sure of that. Not sure of the personality of God ? What do they think God is ? Is He a gas, a force, an energy, a principle working out a mechanical wisdom, without intelligence, without consciousness, without personality ? If He had not revealed Himself, we might be in doubt ; but He has revealed Himself, and there is no doubt. The God of Israel is the creator of heaven and earth, and He is a personal God, the source of the Universal Power—having invisible extension in Immensity, and yet dwelling in bright and living glory at the heart-centre of His mighty Dominion. This God of Israel is the Father of our Lord Jesus, and the recognition of Him and faith in Him is the heart of all zeal for Him, and the first essence

SEASONS OF COMFORT

of true godliness. Though in the highest heaven, He is not far from every one of us, for in the mystery of universal simultaneous extension, which some phenomena of modern science have enabled us to receive as a fact, He fills heaven and earth, and we are in Him and subsist in Him, and are openly manifest to Him in the inmost intents of the heart. The man who realizes this has great power in the present walk through darkness. Nothing can overthrow him. His hand is clasped in God's; his faith in Him is the unbounded confidence of a child in its father, but on a higher, and stronger, and more invincible basis. He knows that all things are of God; that no man has property in himself; that the programme is in God's direction; and he feels as a reasonable sentiment, what Job put into words when he said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him." All things work together for good to them who are called according to His purpose. Even the wicked are His sword, and evil the scourge with which, sometimes for their good, he chastises His own.

Who shall say the lesson is too hard? If any be so disposed, let them remember the lesson is no human invention. It is God's own lesson. Christ is the copy set. Shall we alter the copy to suit the capacities of the last arrived ragamuffin from the streets? This would be folly to be bitterly repented on the day when all things on the earth will be conformed to the divine standard, and when "holiness to the Lord" shall be inscribed on even the bells of the horses in Jerusalem.



The Truth

Asked what you mean by "the truth."—Our answer.—The apostle John.—All the apostles use that form of speech.—Speaking as the apostles speak.—The immense significance involved in the phrase.—A particular sort of truth.—"The truth of the gospel."—A connection between John and Isaiah.—Building a bridge from one to the other.—The truth of the gospel, the first span of the bridge.—The second span, the hope.—Next, the hope of Israel.—"The truth" convertible with the hope of Israel.—Who are addressed in Isaiah?—Walking from John to Isaiah in a perfectly natural manner.—What Isaiah has to say.—A very glorious assurance.—Consolation for every saint of God.—The Jacob that has been given to the spoil.—The disobedient, reprobate Jewish nation.—Divinely created and formed.—Redeemed as no nation has been.—Judgment will never destroy them.—Not individual Jews.—The nation as a whole.—Multitudes have belonged to it who are not now of it.—The backbone of the house of Israel.—The others dross and ephemera.—Adopted Gentiles.—Consolation they may take.—Present experience.—The nature of the comfort.—That in the midst of all evil God will guide.—Adversity brings wisdom.—Final deliverance out of all troubles.

It may have happened in your experience as it has happened in the experience of others, that you have been asked what you mean by "the truth." "Why do you talk so much about 'the truth'?" Why do you call your religious views 'the truth'?" Our answer is furnished by the letters of the apostle John read this morning (2 and 3 John). In these brief epistles, John has much to say about "the truth." The first of the two is addressed to those "whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth." He alludes to "the truth" several times in the body of the epistle. The second of the two epistles is addressed to Gaius, "whom I love in the truth," and to him he says, "we ought to be fellow-helpers to the truth." He further alludes to the truth several times in the course of the epistle.

You are of course well aware that John is not the only apostle who refers to "the truth." All the apostles use that form of speech, and Jesus declares himself to be "the truth." It is, therefore, speaking as the apostles speak, to speak of "the truth," and we desire to speak as the apostles speak rather than as religious society around us speaks. You hear little of "the truth" among the denominations; and you seem to them to speak a barbarous language to speak of "the truth." Yet we will speak of "the truth," not only because we have the primitive and best example for this mode of expression, but also because of the immense significance involved in the phrase. There are various kinds of truth. It is true that the sun shines; it is true that we require air and food in order to live; it is true that man cannot live in water, and that fish cannot live out of water.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

There are thousands of forms of truth, but it is not any truth that formed the uniting bond among the brethren of the apostolic age. The truth that bound them was a particular sort of truth laying hold of particular acts involving particular significances. When John spoke of loving Gaius "in the truth," he did not mean the truth in the abstract sense in which a man speaks of it when he says, "We must always speak the truth"; he meant that certain definite particular truth which Paul defines as "the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2 : 14). When we trace the meaning of this phrase, we shall find a connection, not at first visible, between the brief epistles of John and that other portion of the Scriptures which we have read from Isaiah. Let us build a bridge from one to the other. It is one of the beauties of the truth that so enables us to connect all parts of the Bible together, and to perceive unity throughout. We begin the bridge in John. We have the phrase "the truth." This is the first pier of the bridge, so to speak. We ask, what truth? Paul tells us: "the word of the *truth of the gospel*" (Col. 1 : 5). This is the first span of the bridge. We ask, what is the topic, or theme or subject of this "truth of the gospel"? He answers, "The hope set before us" (Heb. 6 : 18), "the hope of the gospel," "*whereof ye heard before* IN THE WORD OF THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL" (Col. 1 : 23, 5). This is our second span—the *hope*, by which Paul says we are saved (Rom. 8 : 24). We ask, what hope is this? In answer to which he first says it is "one"—"the one hope of our calling" (Eph. 4 : 4), from which he warns us not to be moved away. He shows us the importance of the warning by telling us that our final acceptance can only be realized "if we hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end" (Heb. 3 : 6). This but strengthens the anxiety of every reasonable mind to know and to be assured of the nature of the hope, and so we ask, what is this hope which is placed before us in the word of the truth of the gospel? He gives us the answer in his statement at Rome: "FOR THE HOPE OF ISRAEL I am bound with this chain" (Acts 28 : 20)—*the hope of Israel!* We say, "What Israel do you mean, Paul?" He answers, "*My kinsmen according to the flesh*: who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises" (Rom. 9 : 3-4). We ask, "Have they—your kinsmen, the twelve tribes of the house of Israel—to do with the hope exhibited in your apostolic labours?" He answers, "Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, *hope to come*" (Acts 26 : 7). Ah, then, we may understand, Paul, why it was that when you arrived in Rome, you called *the chief of the Jews* together (Acts 28 : 17), and said unto *them*, "For this cause I have called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for *the hope of Israel* I am bound with this chain" (verse 20).

Thus "the truth" mentioned in John's epistles becomes convertible with the hope of Israel. The one is the other, as we know when the nature of the one and the other is understood. Now, who are addressed in the chapter read from Isaiah? (43). "Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O

Israel : Fear not." Here, we reach the other end of the bridge—Israel. We build our bridge thus : the truth—the truth of the gospel—the hope exhibited in the word of the truth gospel—the hope of the gospel—the hope of Israel. And thus we walk from John to Isaiah in a perfectly natural manner.

Now we will listen to what Isaiah has to say from the Lord, to Israel with whom we have become incorporate by the gospel. "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." This is a very glorious assurance. Let us be quite clear as to its application. We shall find in it some consolation for every saint of God. But let us find it legitimately that we may find it surely. There is a way of applying Scripture, in which the application is not obvious ; that is, the application is made without an evident reason justifying it. This does not ultimately yield satisfaction. That only which is demonstrably truthful gives a rock to the feet.

It is evident that the application of the divine declaration in question is first to the nation of Israel as a whole. The context shows it. We read thus a verse or so before : "Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to the robbers ? Did not the Lord, he against whom we have sinned ? For they would not walk in his ways, neither were they obedient to his law. Therefore he hath poured upon him the fury of his anger, and the strength of battle." There will be no question as to who is the Jacob that has been given to the spoil, and Israel to the robbers. It is this Israel dispersed and afflicted, that is addressed in what comes after, thus : "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 . . ." How comes the disobedient, reprobate Jewish nation to be thus addressed ? The answer is—because nationally, it is the fact that God created and formed them. There would have been no nation of Israel if God had not called Abraham, and given him Isaac by a miracle—(Sarah being both barren and past age—Heb. 11 : 11). There would have been no Israel if God had not further guided Isaac's son, Jacob (called Israel), multiplied his seed, delivered them by miracle from Egypt, and organized them as a nation by the hand of Moses. The nation of Israel was divinely created and formed as no other nation on earth ever was. It was redeemed as no nation has been. It is the only nation divinely surnamed and divinely owned. "You only," says God himself, "have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3 : 2). This divine nation has been disobedient to the divine law ; and upon this divine nation has the divine anger been poured out as upon no other nation. And concerning this nation, as a nation, it is true that the judgment inflicted will never destroy them. "When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned : neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." We are the living witnesses today of the truth of this declaration. Here we are

SEASONS OF COMFORT

more than two thousand years after the record of these words, and we point to the scattered nation of Israel and say, "There they are, unburnt up by the fire of affliction which for many centuries has burnt around them ; undevoured by the stormy waters which they have passed through. It is an indestructible nation ; it is an immortal nation, because God has so decreed : ' Though I make a full end of all the nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee : but I will correct thee in measure ' " (Jer. 30 : 11)

When we think of this, we are not to think of the individual Jews who may be presented to our notice in any generation. We are to think of the nation as a whole with a past and a future. Multitudes will have belonged to this nation in the course of its history who are no part of it in the ultimate and perfect and abiding form to which God is guiding it. The whole generation that came out of Egypt are examples. With them God was not well pleased, and they fell in the wilderness because of their unbelief (Heb. 3 : 17-18 ; 1 Cor. 10 : 5). There have been millions upon millions of the same sort ever since. It has always been true what Paul says—" They are not all Israel that are of Israel." It will not always be so ; for we read in the prophets of a time of which it is said—" Thy people shall be all righteous" : " They shall all know the Lord, from the least of them unto the greatest of them " (Isa. 60 : 21 ; Jer. 31 : 34). But while all have not been Israel that have been " of Israel," there has always been an element of the right sort. Even at the worst stage of their history, when the ten tribes wholly followed Baal, as appeared, under the leadership of Ahab, and Elijah was under the impression that he alone was left faithful, God told him that there were thousands who had not bowed the knee in idolatry (Rom. 11 : 2-4). This faithful element beginning with Abraham, and coming down the ages to the last adopted son at the coming of Christ, is the backbone of the house of Israel, for whose sake—for their development and trial, all the others and all the evil circumstances connected with their history exist ; and of this element, raised from the dead and perfected at the return of Christ, the house of Israel, in its official and influential class, will exclusively consist. The others are dross and ephemera. The earth will be finally and exclusively occupied in glory by this class of Israel in all their generations, reinforced by the great harvest of Messiah's millennial reign. Having our eye on this class, or element, we can understand the emphasis of the assurance of indestructibility which while covering the nation as a whole, more particularly applies to the ultimately permanent ingredient in the nation.

Now this ingredient in our day comprehends adopted Gentiles—Gentiles who receive and become obedient to the hope of Israel—who, as the word of the apostles has enlightened us, become fellow heirs with Israel of the glorious things promised to the fathers from the beginning. It is under this head that we find the individual consolation referred to in the beginning of these remarks. What brings us together this morning ? It is our standing in the hope of Israel. Apart from this standing, we should never have known one

another, let alone our assembly. It is a standing obtained purely through the mercy of Israel's God—the creator and sustainer of heaven and earth, who sent the invitation by Paul, which we have heard. It is a standing greatly to rejoice in. True, Paul makes it a subject of warning, saying, "Thou standest by faith: be not high-minded, but fear. If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee." Still, he enjoins us also to be glad, saying, "Rejoice in the Lord always," "Hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope." This is a joy and a fear that mix very well together. A man who fears to displease God is the only man that can truly rejoice in hope of the promises he has made. Now supposing such to be our case (and surely it is so with some of us—shall we say with most of us? God knoweth), see the consolation we may take from the scripture in Isaiah concerning the Israel of whom in that case we form a part. "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."

Our present experience is an experience of evil—a going through fire and water, as it were. Oftentimes, we are filled with fear lest after all, the evil be too much for us, and calamity overwhelm; lest the fire kindle and the water overflow, and we perish. Here is a word of almighty comfort. It is the voice of God—the voice of Him who holds the stars in his hand—of whom are all things and without whom, a sparrow cannot fall. It is the voice of Him whose words alone can give abiding comfort; for if God be for us, who can be against us? Mark the nature of the comfort. It is not an assurance that Israel shall be free from trouble. It is not an assurance that there will be no towering billows or leaping flames of fire. It is a distinct intimation to the contrary, that we may expect both, but that in the midst of all evil, God will be with His people, and guide them safely through the great and terrible wilderness in which they are threading their way to the promised land. If we are tempted to ask why there should be evil—why the fire and flood—why the wasting and terrifying affliction, we have the answer, "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver: I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (48: 10). This suggests the purifying of good metal by the removal of dross. It is what Paul tells us in another form when he says that the Father chastens us "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness" (Heb. 12: 10). Now, is it not a matter of common experience that human nature in prosperity does not tend towards God, but away from him? and is it not a matter of common experience that adversity brings wisdom and godliness? There is but one answer, and that answer brings with it the assurance that it is true kindness that leads the children of God into trouble. It is hard to bear. It would not be affliction if it were otherwise. It would not do its work if it were pleasant. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby. *Wherefore lift up the hands that*

hang down, and the feeble knees” (Heb. 12 : 11-12). There is this further assurance that God does not, in the case of those who fear, trust, obey, and serve Him, allow trouble to press to the point of destruction. There is a moderating of the rigours of suffering as wisdom may call. Peter expresses the idea when praying for the brethren that, after they have suffered a while, God might “stablish, strengthen, settle them.” God, who can control all circumstances, knows when to remove the pressure, and to fill the hearts of His children with joy, and their mouths with praise. Let the reading of the Psalms of David illustrate this for the comfort of every grieving heart knowing its own bitterness.

God will finally deliver Israel out of all his troubles. The object of them is not destruction, but purification and preparation for the day of unmixed blessing that God has purposed from the beginning, and which will surely come at the appointed time, but in which we should not be fitted to participate without our measure of that chastisement whereof all are partakers—a chastisement which helps us to lower ourselves in our own eyes, as it is meet, and to give God that pure glory and exaltation which are His alone, but to which by nature we are blind, and in the recognition and ascription of which alone can we realize the highest joy.

Self-Examination

Good to be here.—An occasion for renewing strength.—A six days' battle.—Sitting in judgment upon them.—Conflict.—Success in the struggle.—Constitutional sin versus overt and wilful sin.—That which is inseparable from the weakness of this sin-clogged nature.—Deliberate acts.—No-will sin.—Confession and supplication.—Peter.—Judas.—Illustration of the two classes of sin.—Points of light in the gloom.—Matters not so bad as a brother may feel.—“Confess your sins and forsake them.”—The reading of the word.—The Bible Companion.—A better retrospect.—Going higher.—The answer of a good conscience.—The six days to come.—“Redeem the time.”—Our wisdom.—Apostolic teaching.—Denying ungodliness and worldly lusts.—Another policy traceable to the mind of the flesh.—Moody-and-Sankeyism.—“The glory that shall be revealed in us.”

It is probable that every one now present feels as Peter expressed himself on a different and much more interesting occasion—“Lord, it is good for us to be here.” It is refreshing, it is tranquillizing, it is improving, to come together and surround the Lord's table and break bread in memory of him, and to unite our thanksgivings and prayers and praises to Him who is not only the creator of heaven and earth, but the God of Israel and the God and Father of our Lord

Jesus Christ. This appointed assembly on the first day of the week is always an occasion for renewing strength for the conflict in which we are engaged. Let us this morning complete its edifying and purifying power by making it an occasion of self-examination.

We may take the interval since our last breaking of bread as the basis of the process. We have had a six days' battle—six days of experience common to man in his present evil state—six days of mortal occupation mixed with care and watchfulness and endurance. These six days are all gone, never to return ; and we are here to look back upon them and sit in judgment upon them. How do they look ? Each man must make the survey for himself. There will come a moment when the whole of our life will lie in the rear in the same way. There will come a gathering much larger and very different from this, when the aspect and character of the past will be the very question for consideration, as affecting the standing and destiny of thousands upon thousands there assembled in the presence of the presiding brother into whose hands God has committed all judgment. The present occasion differs from that in this, that while on that occasion, the account will be closed and the die cast, and the review serviceable only for a decision, on this occasion the review may be useful in helping us to change the position of the account if need be.

How then do the past six days appear in our eyes ? Have they been all we could have wished them to be ? There is a short answer to this. It is impossible at present that our days can ever be entirely what we should desire ; it is impossible in the nature of things. It is well to know this. Some failing to recognize or remember it, may carry a heavier burden than they need. They may feel as if the amount of earth-cleaving they experience is inconsistent with the relationship of a child of God ; and under this feeling they may abandon effort and give themselves up to despair.

The impossibility arises from the fact stated by Paul in the chapter read this morning (Rom. 7) that in the flesh dwelleth no good thing ; that there is an ever-present law in our members warring against the law of the mind and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin (verse 23), resulting in a distinctly developed conflict in which the man of God has to say (yea, with a feeling of wretchedness—v. 24) that he cannot do the things that he would, and that things that he disowns in his mind, he finds himself compelled to do. Let us realize what this means ; for a good deal of our comfort, and perhaps to some extent, our success in the struggle, depends upon being able to discriminate between constitutional sin (or sin that dwelleth in us—verse 17) and that overt and wilful sin which will exclude from the Kingdom of God. Many illustrations might be given of the thing Paul means when he says, "What I would, that I do not ; but what I hate, that do I" (verse 15). Let one suffice for all.

It is the will of God that we be in a state of continual memory and love towards Himself. It is contrary to His desires concerning us that He should ever be out of our mind, or that we should ever abandon the attitude of adoration and thanksgiving and dependence. It is not to His mind that there should ever be cloud or dimness. Now

SEASONS OF COMFORT

bearing in mind that whatever is opposed to His mind is sin, how do we find ourselves in this matter? Is it not according to our utmost and strongest desire that we should always have God before us? that the vision of His Being should never fade a moment from our eyes? that His praise should be continually in our heart and lip? and that His will should at all times be the potent and delightful magnet of our wills? There can be but one answer to these questions on the part of those who have been begotten of the Word. David's declaration will be the declaration of all who have become with him members of the family of the Lord God Almighty. And what is that? "As the heart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee." The love of Jehovah and the love of Jehovah's testimonies will be in every true brother and sister (when fully developed at all events) as it was in David. But can we realize the aspirations of our hearts in this matter? Are we always in the sunshine of his full memory and love? Are there never times of exhaustion and blank? What about tired nature at the end of the day? What about the irritating and perhaps exasperating pre-occupations of the rough-and-tumble business life many of us are compelled to lead? Is it not the case that oftentimes, we are ashamed of our own weakness and disown the moral chaos to which we find ourselves reduced in the struggle? There is probably not one brother or sister present in whom these questions do not evoke a painful response.

You look back upon the last six days, and perhaps you are distressed at the amount of this kind of experience you have had. Well, do not be too much distressed. If you are wretched on account of it, Paul felt the same, saying, "O, wretched man that I am: who shall deliver me?" He was able to thank God at the prospect of deliverance through the Lord Jesus Christ, and you must fall back on the same consolation. So long as you disown that which is inseparable from the weakness of this sin-clogged nature, you will not be responsible for it; that is, it will be forgiven you if you ask—that is, if your prayer is backed by the Lord Jesus, "who ever liveth to make intercession for us." And as to whether he will back our prayers, that rests with him. It is a question depending upon our state with regard to that other department of sin which relates to our deliberate acts. All men are alike with regard to certain constitutional incapacities; they differ in those states and actions that depend upon volition. No man, for example, can keep awake all the time. Saints and sinners are the same when asleep; but let them awake and you see the difference. There are other matters like sleep; they affect our fitness for divine service, but they do not affect our responsibility, because God is just. The things that in this sense we do which we would not do "are no more I, but sin that dwelleth in me," and for this we shall be forgiven; but if our actions—and action depends upon affection—if our actions are contrary to what God desires, then none of our sins will be forgiven, and an unforgiven man cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Each intelligent mind will be able to supply the other matters and cases to which Paul's rule of no-will sin applies. Wherein the

last six days have been beclouded by these, make confession and supplication to the God of all grace through our Lord Jesus, and he will hear and forgive and help. Peter was forgiven because Christ prayed for him, and Christ prayed for him because his denial was a sin of weakness and not of will. His affection and his will were all towards the Lord. He was sincere when he said, "Lord, I will follow thee to prison and to death," as was shown by the fact that he did so follow Christ to prison and to death afterwards. But when, after a night without sleep (except the few minutes snatched in the garden of Gethsemane), in the darkness and in the cold, he saw Christ, whom he thought invincible, given up to the will of his enemies, it was not wonderful that in the presence of a challenge which meant possible arrest and death, he denied that he knew the Lord. It was only for a moment. At the third challenge, "he went out and wept bitterly." He disowned his act, and took the attitude to receive forgiveness. It was very different with the case of Judas. He deliberately planned his Lord's betrayal for the sake of making money. When his plan succeeded, and he saw the Lord in the hands of his adversaries, he likewise experienced a revulsion of feeling; but it was the revulsion of despair. He went and hanged himself. He knew the justice of the words of Christ: "It were good for that man if he had not been born." The two cases may stand for an illustration of the two classes of sin—the one that may be forgiven, the other that cannot. The important question to consider in our self-examination is: How stand we with regard to the department of will and purpose?

Let us look at the past six days in this light. In the midst of the weakness and the gloom, what points of light are there? Upon what things can we place our finger which we did deliberately with a view to the Lord's will? Some may say, "Well, the fact is, I cannot put my finger upon any such points. I have been so worried and perplexed with matters pertaining to the present life that I cannot remember one thing that I can say was deliberately done with a view to the Lord's will." It is doubtless distressing where a brother feels like this. Still, even in this case, matters may not be so bad as such a brother may feel. Has such an one not refrained from evil at least? Has he not behaved justly and honourably in his transactions? Has he not withheld himself from malice and retaliation of evil? Has he not preserved his mouth from the taint of blasphemy and evil speaking? And has not all this "eschewing evil" been the result of "the fear of God before his eyes"? It is something for a man to "cease to do evil" even if he have not yet as thoroughly as he desires learnt to do well. Of course, it is not enough to refrain from doing evil; we are likewise commanded to "do good"; but there are degrees of attainment, and if a man cannot yet show so large an account as he would desire under the latter head, let him thank God for having been enabled to attain so high a point under the former. Perhaps the man in question may rejoin, "But I have not refrained from evil; I have been hasty and unkind of speech, and my actions have not been without spot." What is to be said in the case? The

Scriptures have only one kind of advice for such : "Confess your sins and *forsake them*." Such are promised mercy. "Repent," in the sense of "Reform," is the standing exhortation of Christ to the seven ecclesias of the lesser Asia, which stood for all in every place and age having ears to hear. Return not like a dog to its vomit. Yield not to the evil environment of the present evil world. Overcome the world. "He that overcometh" is the man to whom the promises are made. And how are we to overcome ? John, the beloved disciple, supplies the answer. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even *our faith*" (1 John 5 : 4). And whence derive we this faith ? Another apostle, even our beloved brother Paul, answers : "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10 : 17). Hence, the most valuable advice that can be given to everyone feeling specially beset by the difficulties of life is to give themselves to the reading of the word. Let it be daily, for our need requires this : let it be methodical, otherwise it will not continue daily, but will by and by die off before the power of circumstances. Let it be by the *Bible Companion*, because hundreds upon hundreds in all parts of the world are reading on this plan, and because it has been found in the experience of a quarter of a century to be practicable and advantageous for the purpose in view. If the experience of the past six days leads you to resolve to give the daily reading of the Scriptures a compulsory place in the coming six days and all that are to follow, your experience will not have been in vain.

And obeying this apostolic exhortation to "desire the sincere (that is, the unadulterated) milk of the word, that we may grow thereby," you will come by and by to be able to indulge in a better retrospect than the mere regret of things done that you would not, and the omission of things that you would. By and by you will be able to think of this and that which you did distinctly for Christ's sake ; that is, of things done from that sense of duty to Christ and the Father which you have derived from your daily and prayer-accompanied readings of the holy oracles. Even if it is nothing better than the giving away of a poor piece of paper like a *Finger Post*, or a pamphlet, you will be able to say to yourself, "Well, I cannot do much, but I have done what I could ; and what I have done, I have done with a view to the duty which I owe Christ ; for what other object can I have in inviting my neighbour's attention to the glorious truth concerning him ?" But you will go higher than this as you make progress. You will remember the commands which say : "Do good unto all men as you have opportunity." "As ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them." "Be kind to the unthankful." "Avenge not yourselves." "Cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord." "Abstain from every form of evil." "Keep yourselves unspotted from the world." "Hate even the garment spotted by the flesh." "Walk in wisdom towards them that are without." "Be followers of God." "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called." "Be ye holy." "Whatsoever ye do (even to matters of eating and drinking), do all to the glory of God."

Under the power of these commandments, you will be able to look back upon any six days, and say : " Such and such a thing I did purely out of consideration for my neighbour. If I had followed my own feelings, I would not have done it. Such and such a thing I did purely because I would be kind to the undeserving. Such and such injury I refrained from resenting because and only because Christ has forbidden it. Such and such a habit I did not indulge in, though the world thinks it all right, because I could not reconcile it with the Lord's command to be clean from all defilement of the flesh and spirit. Such and such a public pleasure I refrained from because, and only because, I would practise, and help my brethren to practise, that non-conformity to the world which Christ enjoins, and to lead that life of sobriety and godliness and denial of pleasure, and separation from the world which he commands."

These things you will be able to rehearse to yourself without Pharisaic complacency. The recollection of them thus will be but that answer of a good conscience towards God, without which in some measure, no man will be able to stand without shame before Christ at his coming. It is those who in these things serve Christ that will have all those other things forgiven which are due to their constitutional weakness—both things done and things omitted. A man who allows " sin to reign in his mortal body, that he should obey it in the lusts thereof " (Rom. 6 : 12), is without hope : for the end of these things is death (verse 21). Forgiveness is not for those who are reprobate to every good work, but for those only who, by obedience, seek to work out their own salvation amid the fear and trembling of this whole clouded state. It is only " if we walk in the light " that the " blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin " (1 John 1 : 7).

We cannot recall or alter the six days that are gone. They have taken their place in the archives of the ages. But the six days to come are ours in a certain sense. To a certain extent, we have the making of them. What is the decision of wisdom in the case but to " redeem the time because the days are evil." Turn away your ear from those who would counsel slackness in this matter. No good was ever done by this class of counsel. The writings of the prophets and apostles are our patterns. " If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." If the prophets and apostles counsel slackness, if they say, " Beware of being too strait laced," if they are on the side of taking it easy and indulging in pleasures and conforming to the world, then we shall be safe in the same line of precept. But if we find that they always (without exception) advise men to take heed—to fear lest they come short—to be in the fear of the Lord all day long—to be as Christ was—to be as God—to pass the time of our sojourning in fear—to crucify the old man—to walk in the narrow way—to follow after holiness—to agonize to be saved—I say if that be the style of scriptural precept (and who shall deny it ?), then our wisdom as ephemeral earth-borns, invited to the mighty emancipation purposed in Christ, is to reject all contrary counsel from whomsoever proceeding, and to walk in the narrow way that leadeth unto life. Many are in danger

SEASONS OF COMFORT

of missing this way through supposing it consists of "doctrines" merely. "Doctrines" in this sense are in their place indispensable, but there are other doctrines without which the doctrines of man's mortality and the earth-location of the kingdom are of no use whatever. "Doctrine" means teaching; and apostolic teaching comprises more than a teaching as to what man is, and what God purposes to do. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared" not only teaching that Christ is coming and that man is subject to death, but "teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world" while looking for the coming (Titus 2:11-13). The teaching that deals only with the mortality of man and the coming of Christ, and omits, and still worse opposes, the teaching that "we should be holy in all manner of conversation," will be found at last to be valueless as the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbal. It is of course pleasanter to be easy; it is more agreeable to wait on inclination and encounter as little self-denial as possible in the process of trying to be saved; but to what is the favour sometimes shown to such a policy, traceable? Distinctly to the mind of the flesh. The carnal mind is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God; and yet it likes to contemplate the idea of salvation. This is why Moody-and-Sankeyism is so popular. As a sister recently observed with reference to the oppositions of this class to the truth: "They don't like the doctrine of obedience: they like to be told they have only to believe, and may follow their own desires until they are sent for to heaven."

But we have not so learnt Christ. Christ has called us to obedience—to a stringent obedience—even to the extent of "purifying us unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." And what if the path is narrow and the discipline severe? Is not the country beyond broad and beautiful? Is not the freedom for which the discipline is preparing us great and glorious and everlasting? In many senses, we can say with Paul, "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us."

The Rechabites

The interview between Jeremiah and the Rechabites.—The divine application of the incident.—The words of a man obeyed; the words of God disregarded.—The spirit of obedience more and more on the wane.—Man's disobedience.—God's approbation of the one spirit, and His stern disapprobation of the other.—Daily reading.—Result of Israel's heedlessness.—The fidelity of the Rechabites.—Obedience to parents.—An unpopular virtue.—The absurdity of disobedience.—Obligations of our position.—His commandments various, such as are first and such as are next.—The love of God.—Love of Christ.—Love thy neighbour.—Easy to obey.—Commandments not easy to obey.—Commandments given not for their own sakes.—That we may be chastened.—Blessedness.

AMONG the many Scriptures which have been written "that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works," there is none more efficacious in a certain way than the account read in our hearing this morning of the interview between Jeremiah and the Rechabites. Let us look at it for a moment. Jeremiah is divinely ordered to send for the Rechabites, and bring them into one of the apartments of the temple and offer them wine. The Rechabites were so called from their ancestor Rechab, whose son Jonadab left various directions for the guidance of their descendants. Under these directions, they lived a pastoral life in tents in the open field. Their being within the walls of Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah's message, was due to the presence of Nebuchadnezzar's army in the country, from whom they naturally sought refuge in the principal fortified city of the land. Among other paternal directions for the regulation of their house was the command to abstain from the use of wine. It was principally with reference to this they were now sent for. Jeremiah having assembled them, produced tankards of wine and cups, and proposed to them to drink. "Drink ye wine," said Jeremiah. "We will drink no wine," said they. "Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father, commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons, for ever. . . . Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab, our father."

It is with the divine application of this incident that we have to do. Such an incident, publicly transacted in the courts of the temple, would naturally attract notice, and secure attention to the lesson divinely intended. What was the lesson intended? Not abstinence from wine, though that is a good thing, as it is written: "Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine: they that go to seek mixed wine. Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup, when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder" (Prov. 23 : 29-32).

SEASONS OF COMFORT

The lesson intended is conveyed in Jehovah's own words : " The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab . . . are performed : for unto this day they drink no wine, but obey their father's commandment . . . But ye hearkened not unto me. I have sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings. . . . But ye have not inclined your ear, nor hearkened unto me " (Jer. 35 : 14-15). The words of a man are obeyed ; the words of God are disregarded. This is the central argument of the incident. This is God's complaint to the house of Israel by Jeremiah. And is it not a reasonable complaint ? Whose words ought to be obeyed, if not the words of " the high and lofty One, inhabiting eternity " ? Is it not a complaint that might, with peculiar force, be addressed to this age of the world ? The commandments and ordinances of men are submitted to in all the ways of life, but the commandments of God have ceased even to be an intelligible idea, let alone a practical power, in the habitations of men. Yea, it may be said that the spirit of obedience in any direction is more and more on the wane. If man's commands are obeyed, it is not from the spirit of obedience, but in the spirit of fear of consequences. Human law would soon be a dead letter, if it were not for the handcuffs of the police and the powder and shot of the military. Yet the spirit of obedience is the noblest spirit under the sun. It was the departure from it in the beginning that led to the world's woes : it is the return to it that will be the salvation of men. " By one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous (or obedient). "

God manifests His approbation of the one spirit, and His stern disapprobation of the other, in a special manner in the incident before us. He reminds Israel of the means He had adopted to bring them into the path of obedience, and He upbraids them as to the attitude they have shown. " I have sent unto you, " He says, " all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them. " In passing there is something worth notice in the expression, " *rising up early and sending them.* " It frequently occurs throughout the prophets. It illustrates the earnestness of the divine exhortation. When a man is deeply interested in his work, he gets up early. The prophets were early risers ; they aimed at making a distinct impression with the people. Therefore they chose the first part of the day. There is a lesson for us here : give divine matters an early part in your daily programme. Do not wait till your mind is unimpressible through exhaustion. Hear the voice of God in the reading of His word, when the mind, in the freshness of the morning's energy, is more susceptible to impression than after a day's toil and vexation. To have your daily reading in the morning will actually help to make the day less of a toil and a vex. The reading of the word acts like oil on the surface of water, rendering it less liable to disturbance from the passing wind.

See the result of Israel's heedlessness to the divine requirements. " This people hath not hearkened unto me ; therefore thus saith the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel : Behold, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I

have pronounced against them : because I have spoken unto them, but they have not heard ; and I have called unto them, but they have not answered." Look, on the other hand, at the way in which the obedient attitude of the Rechabites was estimated : " Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according unto all that he hath commanded you : therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel : Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me for ever." Jehovah regarded with such favour the fidelity of the Rechabites to the paternal traditions of their house, that He decrees the continuance of their posterity amid all the circumstances tending to their obliteration. There is little to be known accurately of the state of tribes and families in the east, but, doubtless, if we could know matters as they are known to God, we should discover the descendants of Rechab, intact somewhere among the peoples of the east. They will, doubtless, be revealed in their ancestral identity in the great day of manifestation that comes with Christ, and will as doubtless occupy an honourable place in the mortal arrangements of the Kingdom of God. But, however this may be, we cannot mistake the emphasis of the divine endorsement in the case of a virtue which is little to be found in our day in these countries of the west ; a virtue, not only of obedience, but of obedience to parents. This is a very unpopular virtue in our day. It had become so in the days of Jesus, who condemned the Rabbinical traditions by which a man was absolved from all obligations towards his parents on the payment of a sum to the temple. It remains the fact (however men may disregard, or may have forgotten that fact), that to the Lord God of Israel, who is the Creator, Upholder, and Proprietor of all things, it is well pleasing, and a matter of command from Him to us, that, " children obey their parents," and honour the hoar head, and be respectful and merciful to the aged and infirm.

But the entire Rechabite incident is capable of a much closer application to our case, which it is appropriate and profitable to make on this, the occasion of our weekly surrounding of the table of the Lord. The Rechabites are, of course, a mere accessory to the main purpose of the prophet's message. They are introduced as a lever to the argument. The object was to force home on the consciousness of Israel the absurdity and heinousness of their disobedience of the commandments of God, and to influence them by exhibiting the consequences of their course. The application lies here : For a time God has departed from Israel and has turned to the Gentiles with an invitation to such as are disposed among the Gentiles to become His people. In response to that invitation we are here this morning, in fulfilment of our part as obedient children. The point for us to consider is : Shall we fare any better than Israel after the flesh if, like them, we are disregarding of the commandments delivered to us ? Paul's answer to this is very explicit. " If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee . . . Continue in his goodness, otherwise thou also shalt be cut off " (Rom. 11 : 21). We have not received the same commandments : but we stand

SEASONS OF COMFORT

related to the same God, who changeth not from age to age. We do not stand in the law delivered from Horeb's summit "amidst blackness, and darkness, and tempest." We are justified by a faith made perfect in love-prompted works. Nevertheless, the dispensation of faith is from the same God, who is a consuming fire, and into whose hands it is a terrible thing to fall (Heb. 12 : 29 ; 10 : 31). If there is any difference in the stringency of the two systems, Paul makes the difference in favour of the dispensation of faith. His words are : " He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses : of how much *sorer punishment*, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God ? " And again : " If the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward, *how shall we escape*, if we neglect so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord ? "

Consequently, we do well to realize the solemn obligations of our position, while thanking God for its great privileges. Like Israel, we also have received commandments to observe ; and if, like Israel, we refuse to obey, like Israel we shall be cast away in anger to destruction. We have not been commanded to circumcise ; we have not been commanded to offer our first-born to the Lord, with sacrifice of lamb or turtledove ; we have not been commanded to observe sabbaths, and feasts, and times, and seasons, and to repair to the priest in Jehovah's sanctuary in the confession of our sins with the blood of bulls and goats. These appertained to the first covenant, and were done away in Christ. But we have received commandments for all that ; and it will be time well spent just to glance at a few of them, by way of bringing them to remembrance, having in full view the declaration of the Lord Jesus, that, except our righteousness exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no case enter the Kingdom ; and his still more emphatic saying that, Not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter the Kingdom, but he that doeth the will of our Father in heaven. Such, and such only, he says, will he own as his brethren (Matt. 5 : 20 ; 7 : 21 ; 12 : 50).

What, then, are his commandments ? They are various, and there are such as are first, and such as are next in order. On the first, Jesus has expressly placed his finger, saying, " This is the first and the great commandment." What is it ? " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind and with all thy strength." How is it with us, brethren, on this point ? It is for each man to examine himself. Of one thing we may be certain : it is not possible to go too far in the cultivation of the love of God : for what is left when a man has given all his heart, and soul, and strength ? And who can refuse this reasonable service ? A man has only to realize God as He is displayed to us in the Scriptures—historically, illustratively, incidentally, declaratively, prophetically, doctrinally, preceptively—every way, to have his highest adoration enkindled, if his heart be not a piece of stony barrenness. The love of God is the first characteristic of the family of God. It comes as all love comes—by acquaintance ; and this acquaintance is only possible

in our day in the reading of the Scriptures. Therefore we are on the right road to render the required obedience of the first commandment, in performing the wisdom of a daily reading of the Scriptures.

There is a "second" commandment of which Jesus speaks : but there is another to be mentioned before the second, coming between the first and second, strange as it may appear. It is a commandment that is involved in the first, in so far as Christ is involved in God. There is a love of Christ that forms part of the love of God. No man can love God acceptably who does not love Christ. Christ is the way to God. He is the Father's voice to us. We are to love and honour Christ even as we love and honour the Father who sent him, and who was in him and with him. This, Christ commands, and Paul illustrates, saying : "The love of Christ *constraineth me.*" He makes the attainment of the love of Christ the measure of sainthood. His words are beautiful words, forcible words. He prays for the Ephesians, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ; that ye, being rooted and grounded *in love*, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ; and to know *the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.*" Labour to know much of this, brethren. While it is beyond human faculty as a matter of understanding, it is a glorious fact to be acquainted with, and received, and contemplated. The faith of it will warm and ennoble the mental man, and strengthen, as with a cordial, the drooping heart of the pilgrim, as he threads his way through the chill and darkness of this probation. Beware of suffering yourselves to be robbed of the great consolation. Too much hair-splitting jargon about the nature of Christ is liable to dissipate his noble idea from your mind, and leave you to wonder in your bitterness how so sweet a matter should generate such a bootless war of abstractions. Be content with the testimony, and leave philosophy and vain deceit to the dogs which delight to gnaw the bones. Be sure that ye let Christ dwell in your hearts by faith ; be sure that ye know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge, otherwise ye fail of a commandment which is part of "the first and great commandment," the oversight of which will be found serious in the day of account.

The "second" commandment is like unto it : "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." This is the root of all true courtesy and good manners. A consideration for your neighbour's comfort and well-being, at least equal to what you entertain for your own, will lead to those acts of kindness which differ as much from the well-bred mannerisms of polite society as the genuine sovereign does from the brass counterfeit. But the commandment gives us higher ground than the attractiveness of a gracious deportment. A disciple of Christ will shine in this matter, not because it is "the thing," or because it is of advantage in society, but *because it is a matter of command.* "This I command you, that ye love one another." Recognizing this, a man will be able to persevere amid all the mortifications of the degraded state of society surrounding us. He will, for Christ's sake, do what Christ has commanded, knowing that it is only for a

SEASONS OF COMFORT

brief season that we are asked to act a gracious part amid all ungraciousness and evil.

And this leads to another class of commandment, at which there is only time to glance. The commands to love God, and Christ, and our neighbour, are commands that are comparatively easy to obey ; but there are other commandments that are not easy to obey, our obedience to which is the test whether we really obey those already mentioned. Concerning this, Jesus says, " If ye love me, keep my commandments " ; and again, " He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, *he it is that loveth me.*" Now, it is surely unnecessary to say that when Jesus thus speaks of his commandments, he speaks of them all. He does not mean that we may keep some and neglect others. His charge to the apostles, concerning the nations they were about to go forth and enlighten, was, " Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Some of these we have observed. We have believed ; we have been baptized ; we meet for the celebration of the Lord's death ; we read the Scriptures ; we love the Lord ; we love the brethren. What lack we yet ? Perhaps we do not lack : but perhaps we do. There are other commandments. " Love your enemies ; pray for them that despitefully use you and afflict you. Resist not evil. Avenge not yourselves. Do good to the unthankful and the evil. If a man wrongfully sue you at the law, and take away your cloak, instead of bringing a cross-action, let him have your coat also." These are commandments not easy to obey. They go contrary to nature. Because of this, we are liable to give them the go-by in practice. But they are commandments of Christ for all that : commandments that have been delivered for and to the house of Christ. And for what were they given ? Evidently for obedience. For no other purpose could they have been intended. They are not commandments that could have been given for their own sakes. It is not according to God's own will—it is not according to His declared purpose, that the evil should have the upper hand—that wrong should have a free course—that righteous men should be trampled under foot of the wicked, always. It is only for a season these things are permitted. It is only for a season they are commanded : and being commanded, it is for the proof of our obedience, and for self-exercise and discipline in submission to the divine will. When God required of Abraham the sacrifice of Isaac, it was not that God had delight in seeing Abraham put his beloved son to death : it was that He might prove him. When God asks us to submit to evil, it is not that He has delight in the triumph of evil : it is that we may be chastened and proved under His mighty hand. " Wherefore," says Peter, " humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time." Affliction is only for a moment : weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. It was for the comfort of all his brethren, in every generation during his absence, that the Lord said to the company of his disciples in Galilee : " Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn : for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek : for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which

do hunger and thirst after righteousness : for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful : for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for great is your reward in heaven : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

Right Views Of Life

Importance of right views.—The basis of personal acceptability.—God takes pleasure in wise men.—Wrong views natural.—A depressing, demoralizing, degrading "view."—Individual life.—Larger matters.—History.—David the centre of bustling scenes.—What is the meaning?—God on the scene.—Downwards on the stream of time.—Human history.—The hand of God in it.—Britain of ancient days.—Tyre.—Her busy commerce, riches, and pride.—The divine estimate of these things.—Tyre prevailed against.—Our own day.—Britain; her wisdom, multiplied riches; her heart lifted up.—The popular philosophy.—The true key.—God has not changed.—Britain; retribution.—Pride will not always rear itself unmolested.—Another guarantee.—Paul, the apostle.—Divine origin of the gospel he preached.—Only one conclusion.—Enlightened "views."—Tribulation graduated and diversified.—A moral necessity.—Humility and patience come only with tribulation.

THE matters presented in the portions of Scripture read this morning, if thoroughly realized, will greatly help us to form right views of life. It is of a very great importance to have right views of life. There is a tendency in modern times to deprecate this idea. It is common for people of advanced sentiments, as they imagine, to scout all care about "views" one way or other. They say, "Out upon your 'views'; go home and eat your dinner, and sleep, and enjoy yourself, and don't trouble about 'views.'" It only requires a very little reflection to see the unwisdom and absurdity of this. "Views" constitute the basis of personal acceptability or otherwise everywhere. What is the essential difference between a man you love and a man you cannot love? It will be found to lie in the state of his mind. The mental perceptions and appreciations of the one, as expressed in his words and manners and doings, create a sense of acceptability and delight which is not at all excited by the other, who, on the contrary, excites aversion and disgust by his want of these. What is the difference between an intelligent man, whose company gives you pleasure, and an idiot who creates loathing? They are both the same in some

SEASONS OF COMFORT

points. They both have arms and legs, mouth, nose, and eyes, and yet how differently they affect you. It is not a difference of beauty, for an idiotic-looking person, who is intelligent and wise, will evoke your love, while a person ever so beautiful in a classic sense, will fail to interest you if he lacks intelligence. No, it is a difference of "views," understanding this in the widest sense of intellectual recognitions.

Now, this rule, holding good among men, holds good also in our divine relations. It is a matter of revelation, whether we like it or not, that God takes pleasure in wise men, and "hath no pleasure in fools." "The foolish shall not stand in thy presence." "The wise shall inherit glory, but shame shall be the promotion of fools." "Be not unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is." The foolish virgins found the door shut. "Be not like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding." Such is the almost universal drift of Scripture teaching. Consequently, so far from "views" of life being unimportant, they are of the first consequence for good or evil. Right views are to be sought carefully after, with the diligence a man bestows on everything affecting his life in a common sense. Right views acted out are our life : wrong views, death.

Wrong views are natural, because without special information, we cannot help coming to wrong or uncertain conclusions from what we see. We see life an aimless journey from the cradle to the grave, if we are to judge by the sight of our eyes. A man, with much toil and anxiety, conducts himself to old age, and dies, and is forgotten. We see this in the untold millions of cases in the past. We see it going on around us. We see no exception. What is the impression it makes—what is the "view" it gives us apart from special information? Why, that it is of no use troubling about anything : "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die ;" let us take all the pleasure we can while we live, for we came out of darkness and go soon to darkness again, and to darkness for ever. What a depressing, demoralizing, degrading "view" this would be : a view that would soon destroy us ; a view, natural, judging from what we can see for ourselves, yet a view untrue to facts that have not come within the range of our actual vision, but which have been within the range of other people's vision, and which have been credibly testified to us—yea, more, which have left marks in certain phases of human history which can be seen and deciphered by all who are concerned for the formation of right views.

These remarks apply to individual life : but they are true also of larger matters. They are true of national life. History, to the eye of a merely contemporary observer, seems a chaos, without plan, without result, a meaningless struggle—an endless repetition of little incidents, without a goal in the progress of the ages. Let a man give in to this view, and he will be dwarfed and withered by it. He will consider only the exigencies of the passing hour, and respond only to ideas of self-interest and consult his pleasure alone. His natural tendency to stuntedness and smallness will be increased by the powerful super-incumbent pressure of this intensely dreary "view."

We shall be helped in the struggle for right views by trying to realize the matters and facts presented in the three portions read this morning. In the first we see David in the centre of busy scenes, arising out of the organization and establishment of his kingdom after the death of Saul. The tribes come to him from various parts. The Levitical families offer their allegiance. In conjunction with them he conveys the ark of God, with much circumstance of pomp and gladness, from one part of the land to another, and sets it in the midst of a tent he had pitched for it, and offers sacrifice. He organizes the Levites into orders for alternate service in the courts of the tabernacle. Some are musical one way; some another. All are in hearty harmony with the business in hand. David delivers into their hands a noble psalm, which they sing to instrumental accompaniment, and all the people joyfully say, "Amen!" That is the picture we get a glimpse of as we look into the past through the particular window we stand at in the reading of the 15th chapter of 1 Chronicles.

Now, looking at that picture, we ask, What is the meaning of it? How came David there? How came the tribes to be in the land? How came they to be engaged with the ark; and how came they to be offering sacrifice and singing praise with joy? When these questions are rationally answered, we get facts which throw light on the apparent darkness of human history. We see God on the scene with a plan shaping and guiding the chaos to an appointed end. We see him invite Abraham from his native country, and covenant to him everlasting possession of the land of Canaan. We see Jacob and his family go down to Egypt, and sojourn there till they become a numerous community oppressed of the Egyptians, as their descendants are today in the European countries. We see Moses appear on the scene and show the world the great marvel of an unorganized race of serfs delivered from the grasp of a great military nation by an interposition of power from without on their behalf—power of an unnatural sort—power that paralysed all human resistance in the infliction of noisome plagues, and the ravages of the angel of death. We see this defenceless assembly cross the Red Sea followed by their pursuers, who are destroyed in the returning waters. We see them wandering, with apparently aimless feet, among the wasteness of a barren peninsula, among whose frowning hills they encamp and murmur. We see them sit down at the foot of Sinai, from whose cloud-invested summit, amid darkness, and earthquake, and flame, they hear the voice of God proclaim commandments for their observance. After a twelve months' encampment, we see them strike their tents and march. We see them arrive on the borders of the land of promise. We see them despatch twelve men to spy the land. We see them receive the spies and listen to their report, and then we see the whole congregation break out into a mutiny against Moses and Aaron, refusing to go forward, and proposing the stoning of Moses and a return to the land of Egypt. We see the glory of the Lord flame out blindingly before them, arresting their madness, rescuing Moses from their hands, and sentencing the whole congregation to a forty years' sojourn in the wilderness. The forty years at an end,

SEASONS OF COMFORT

we see them cross the Jordan under Joshua, and carry all before them, destroying the Canaanitish inhabitants, and settling down in their place. We see them turn aside to idol worship, and brought under the harrows of affliction in consequence, from which they are repeatedly delivered, till God raised them up David to be their king.

As we reflect on these things, and trace the story downwards on the stream of time to our own day, when the land lies desolate and the people are everywhere in dispersion, and forward (not far forward, thanks be to God) to the appointed restoration of the kingdom of Israel under the Son covenanted to David, we have enlightened "views" formed within us which neutralize and destroy the views of the natural man touching the chaos of all human things. We see that human history is not the unmitigated vanity it seems. We see that the hand of God is in it, and as we contemplate the consummation exhibited in the prophetic delineations of the glorious future to which he is guiding affairs on earth, we take heart amid the despondencies of the merely natural mind, and adapt ourselves to the new and enlightening "views" with strengthened hand and ennobled heart, waiting for God in the season of his appointed visitation.

Help of the same sort, though not in the same form, comes to us with the portion read from Ezekiel (27 and 28). Here we are introduced to the most reliable picture which ancient history furnishes of the maritime and commercial greatness of the Britain of ancient days. The Phoenicia of profane historians—whose power and riches were concentrated in the seaport of Tyre, is addressed in this chapter. The picture is full of detail, and life, and colour. There is a glimpse of the various countries, and lands, and people that traded with Tyre, and a description of the articles of merchandise they contributed to the Tyrian fairs. As the result of her busy commerce, Tyre became rich; and, as a result of her riches, she became proud. So Jehovah here tells her: "With thy wisdom and with thine understanding thou hast gotten thee riches, and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures: by thy great wisdom and by thy traffic hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up because of thy riches." Now, this is a common picture among the peoples and nations of the present day; and the spectacle of their undisturbed, unrighteous might is liable to trouble righteous minds. Because of this, how profitable to listen to the divine estimate of these things in the case of Tyre: "Therefore, thus saith the Lord God: Because thou hast set thine heart as the heart of God, behold, therefore, I will bring strangers upon thee, the terrible of the nations: and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy brightness. They shall bring thee down to the pit, and thou shalt die the deaths of them that are slain in the midst of the seas." And so it came to pass. Tyre was prevailed against by enemies that God raised up against her, and all her glory vanished, and her very existence came to an end. The relics of her departed greatness are now to be seen at the bottom of the sea on a

clear day, in the neighbourhood of the spot which was once the centre of universal commerce, and the seat of much power and pride.

The application of these facts to our own day must be obvious in view of the existence of just precisely the same state of things. We are here in the midst of a small but great country, exercising a wide empire. Britain is the centre of the world's commerce. By reason of her wisdom in a variety of directions, she has multiplied riches ; and because of her riches her heart is lifted up. Pride and arrogance prevail on every hand. It is considered the right sentiment to foster, nationally and individually. Successful commerce is looked at as the result of skill wisely applied, and a man is considered to be justified in being proud of his abilities, and, therefore, of their results. The popular philosophy on this point is very shallow. The true key is struck in the words of Moses to Israel on the plains of Moab, on the eve of their entry into the land of promise. He told them of the prosperity that awaited them in the event of obedience, and then cautioned them against wrong "views" on the subject : He told them to beware, lest in the midst of their prosperity, they should say, "My power and the might of mine hand hath gotten me this wealth. But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God : for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth" (Deut. 8 : 17). This is the true view of the case. Consequently, pride, national or individual, on account of prosperity, is an unreasonable thing. The true attitude is that of thankfulness to God, and mercy to man ; but as for pride, it ought to be put far away. It is an absurd and hateful thing. If it is so to man, it is much more so to God. He has declared his hatred of it in all the Scriptures. His hatred of it is exhibited to all the world in the absolute nonentity of Tyre in the present day. Tyre once proudly flaunted her glory and her greatness in the face of heaven, as Britain does today. He brought her to nought because of her pride, as is declared to us in the oracle read from Ezekiel. And God has not changed. And Britain also will come under the same retribution. It is written that "The Lord of Hosts hath purposed to stain the pride of all glory, and to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth." The image vision of Daniel shows that this is intended in the most comprehensive sense. Consequently, are we not enabled to wait patiently for God ? It is written, "They shall not be ashamed that wait for me." Waiting may be trying ; it is intended to be : but it will not be destructive to a wise man. Such a man knows that God is great, and the ages long, and that man has no claim to existence, and that it is a privilege to stand by any length of time and see how God works out his purpose. "Though the vision tarry, wait for it. It will surely come." The prosperity of the wicked will come to an end. The pride of those who neither fear God nor regard man will not always rear itself unmolested in the earth. The day will come, and that not a long distant day, when Jehovah will arise and shake terribly the earth, and bring down the haughty, and save and exalt all the meek who tremble at His greatness, fear His word, hope in His mercy, and wait on His purpose. The condition of Tyre today is a guarantee. It was very unlikely in the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

day of her power that her greatness would ever be disturbed. Now behold her—a desolation, scarcely to be identified in the land of the living—a deserted place of ruins where fishermen spread their nets, as was foretold. As we look, let us ponder and mentally assimilate the only right views in the case. Let us refuse to be compromised in the general insanity of the people. Let us repudiate, in our own practice, their principles and habits of pride, and indifference, and worldliness. Let us remember that the glory of the present order is a passing scene which will soon have vanished as completely as a dream of the night ; while the glory of the world to come will be lasting as the universe, and delightful as the wildest poetical conception.

We have another guarantee of this consummation, in the third portion of the word read this morning (Gal. 1). In this case we have Paul, the apostle, speaking to us. On this point, there is not the least doubt. No one, except the blasphemer, whose heart does not go with his words, denies or in the least doubts, that the words read in our hearing this morning were written by Saul of Tarsus, afterwards called Paul, whose head was taken off by the emperor Nero, because of his leadership of the hated Christians. What are his words? "I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." On what grounds does Paul make this claim to a divine origin of the gospel he preached? He recites these grounds several times in speeches recorded in the apostolic history. He constantly laments the fact that he was once a persecutor. He takes consolation in the fact that he persecuted with a righteous motive, but in ignorance of the truth. He told the Jews over and over again how he ceased to be a persecutor, and became a preacher of the faith he once destroyed. In brief, he says it was because he had seen the Lord Jesus. He recites the circumstance, so as to show it was real. There was no room for deception or mistake. It happened exactly in the way to exclude the possibility of mistake. It happened, not at night, but in the full blaze of noonday. It did not happen when he was by himself, but when he was in the midst of a retinue of officials who were witnesses of the strange phenomenon. It did not affect him only, but threw them all to the ground. It was not a sensation limited to himself ; they were all overpowered by the light, and heard the voice that addressed Paul, though they could not make out the words. It did not pass off, and leave no effect ; it sealed Paul's eyes, and left him blind. It did not remain isolated from a logical sequel, as a hallucination might be supposed to do ; the leading professor of the faith of Christ visited Saul, while yet with closed eyes, and cured his blindness, and this logical sequel was independent of Saul's volition or knowledge (and, therefore, unconnected with any such hallucination as his enemies suppose him to have been the subject of), for the said leading professor—Ananias—came independently of any message from Saul, and purely as the result of supernatural instructions from Christ to do so, to which he raised objections in the first instance, on the ground of Saul's notorious enmity to Christ. When, after all these facts are

weighed and considered, we come to look at Paul's life, consider Paul's apostolic success, and read Paul's wonderful epistles, there is only one conclusion left for earnest logic, and that is, that Paul's testimony in the first chapter of Galatians is true ; that the gospel he preached was not in any sense a human affair, but a gospel emanating from God, and founded on facts as palpable as our present existence.

Here is a powerful contribution to enlightened "views," for if these things are so, then Christ lives, and Christ is coming, and the future belongs to him, and the present is only wisely used when used in harmony with his mind and will. Animated by such views as these, a man will not be content to live as if he had no future. He will not be content to live simply as he inclines as a natural man. He will not be content to remain in ignorance of the will of Christ, or in indifference to it when he knows it. He will not be content to live for present objects and present enjoyments. He will rise superior to the pressures and appearances of this passing life. He will take the mental attitude expressed in Paul's question when the Lord met him : "Lord, what wouldst thou have me to do ?" He will study the commandments of Christ and the law of the Lord, and he will aim to carry them out with a steady hand and a firm step, regardless of human opinions or human consequences.

"Consequences" may be often unpleasant—yea, worse than unpleasant—hurtful, even deadly. This the apostles found, who suffered the loss of all things, and paid the last tribute of faithfulness on the executioner's block. But shall we shrink from submission to Christ because of the results ? How, in that case, shall we be fit to stand with those Apocalyptically revealed in glory as those who loved not their lives to the death ? Nay, nay, let us heed the Lord's exhortation who says, "Be thou faithful unto death"—not that we shall necessarily go to death ; but be prepared for that in case of need. The mode of tribulation is graduated and diversified according to the endless variations of individual requirement. The Lord knoweth them that are his : and he knows how much and what sort of tribulation each case requires. Let us humble ourselves under his mighty hand with this confidence. "My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him." This is the counsel of eternal wisdom : it is founded on the highest reason and goodness. Tribulation is a moral necessity. We cannot be brought into a reasonable state without it. Paul defines its mission thus : "Tribulation *worketh patience* ;" and through much tribulation it is appointed we must enter the kingdom of God. The wisdom of it is not difficult to see. Humility and patience are indispensable attributes of excellence of character. They are characteristic of the angels, to equality with whom the gospel invites us, and who have known evil in their day. They come only with tribulation. They do not come with luxury and indulgence. The silver spoon usually generates pride and impatience. Tribulation drives those out of the natural man, and helps us to come more and more into that state in which God will be able to find pleasure in us, and forgive us for Christ's sake, and give us an abiding place in the glorious household

of His Son. Recognition of this will enable us to take trouble with a little more composure than if we supposed it were a pure and aimless evil. It is by no means such. It is pre-eminently among the "all things" which "work together for good for those who love God, who are the called according to his purpose."

The Lessons Of The Genealogies

Long list of names.—Line from Adam to Christ.—Persons who lived.—We, also, on the march.—A fleeting scene soon to disappear.—Why the genealogy at all?—To show that Christ belongs to it.—The necessity for the Adamic extraction of the Lord Jesus.—Plan of redemption.—The line does not go beyond Christ.—A meaning in this.—David's house.—The promised son.—The natural heir to David's throne.—Our relation to this glorious one.—Patience and comfort.—We get much of both when we look at him.—Dark picture.—The contemplation of the past.—What he is now and what he will be.—He is coming.—Jehovah's covenant stands fast.—The gladness of the chosen.—The unavailing terror of the rejected.

THIS morning, we had read in our hearing the chapter from Luke containing the genealogy of Christ. It does not appear as if we could get much that was profitable or interesting from that long list of names. It appears a dry and useless category altogether; but we sometimes find things different from what they appear. It may be so in this case. Consider, first, that these names represent persons that lived in an unbroken line from Adam to Christ. How wonderfully interesting is the numeration, from this point of view alone. There is nothing like it in the whole range of human literature. In ordinary cases, a line of generation is soon lost from memory or record. It is considered a notable and a dignified thing for even an aristocratic family to be able to carry its pedigree back to the time of William the Norman. The mass of mankind know nothing of their great-grandfathers. But here is an unbroken and attested line of ancestry bridging a gulf of four thousand years—a marvel that few people appreciate, because one with which all people are familiar—like the sun, the greatest and most astounding phenomenon in human experience, and yet the least noticed because so well known.

Then consider that this list of names represents a succession of persons who, in their day, lived as really as we may now feel ourselves to do. There may not seem to be much in this, but the power of it will be beneficially felt where it is distinctly realized; for does it not enable us to feel that we, also, are on the march—that our days upon earth are as a shadow—that there is nothing abiding? We have to school ourselves into the recognition of this manifest fact. It is a fact

we do not easily realize at any stage of life ; at all stages, life seems real, and the ending of it somewhat legendary. In youth, age seems a long way off, and death an old fogey calculation. In young manhood or womanhood, life is full of earnest vigour and pleasing possibilities, which fresh and lively powers set themselves to realize, without much thought of the ultimate drift. At maturity, anxieties have taken the place of hope, and equally shut out the future, as they engross the present. In old age, susceptibility deadens, and desire fails, and the face turns backwards rather than forwards. At every stage, it requires an effort of the mind rightly to estimate life as a fleeting scene soon to disappear, with all its joys or burdens, as the case may be. The success of this effort marks the difference between wisdom and folly. Whatever helps us in it, helps us to be wise and good. A man who has once fairly mastered and accepted the fact that the life we now live is a short-lived affair, is much more likely to be dutiful towards God, and kind and patient with all men, than the man whose mind turns only on present matters. We look at the long line of men, whose pictures are preserved to us in the genealogy. We see them one by one pass from the cradle to the grave. We look at ourselves ; we see that we are somewhere between these two points, and that it is only a question of a little while for us, also, to reach the end of all living. Speaking, now, of the natural order of things, we also must by and by pass in this natural order into the silent record of the past, for good or evil, as we now live. The effect of such a recognition of truth must be felt by every one ; it inclines us to look at life in a serious way, and to enquire which is the best way to spend it. There is but one answer of wisdom to this enquiry. Fear God ; hope in his mercy ; do his commandments. Patiently continue in this, the only line of true well-doing, to the end, and thou shalt see in the end of it light and gladness, strength and wisdom, glory, honour, and immortality. So much we may deduce from the array of names which connect Adam and Christ.

But there is another line of contemplation opened out to us in the genealogy : why is the genealogy given at all? Here is a line with Adam at one end and Christ at the other. What can be the object of such a line, except to show that Christ belongs to it ? Why the care to show an unbroken pedigree from Adam, if Christ be not of that pedigree ? Ah, but he is of that pedigree. He is introduced to us in the very first verse of the New Testament as " Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." True, he is of another extraction as well. He is the begotten of God, the son of the Eternal Father by the Spirit overshadowing his virgin-mother, Mary ; but one line of extraction does not destroy another. They both meet and blend in the glorious man Christ Jesus—" the Son of God and the Son of Man." The truth has enabled us to comprehend the necessity for the Adamic extraction of the Lord Jesus ; and we have set our faces against all who would, with speeches however fair and plausible, obliterate that extraction. In him, that which was wrong with the Adamic race was to be put right as a nucleus or starting point for a new development. The accomplishment of this work required that he should be as much

SEASONS OF COMFORT

a son of Adam as those whom he was brought into the world to save. His work was to "abolish death." This he has done (2 Tim. 1 : 10) ; he has done it by death and resurrection (Heb. 2 : 14 ; 1 Cor. 15 : 21). But how could he have done this except as a son of Adam in subjection to death ? for as yet he has abolished death in no one but himself. "Death hath no more dominion *over him*" (Rom. 6 : 9). But it has dominion as yet over the rest of mankind. The victory has been accomplished by his obedience (Rom. 5 : 19) ; and he will share the results of his victory with all his brethren in due time ; for God hath given him power over all flesh with this view (John 17 : 2 ; 5 : 21-29).

God's great and holy ways required such a mode of redemption, and, therefore, such a son as one who should be at one and the same time Son of Adam and Son of God. Had God not been holy, he might have dispensed with a plan of redemption altogether, and reprieved the erring sons of Adam in the simple exercise of his prerogative of mercy. Had he not been great and just he might have accepted the death of a substitute who was in no way involved in the matter at issue ; and allowed the whole race to go free in consideration of the payment of their debts by another. But it is not so. In his forbearance, he proposes forgiveness (Rom. 3 : 25), but not unconditional. There must be a declaration of his own righteousness in the whole case, in the shedding of the blood of one whose blood-shedding shall be a declaration of righteousness by reason of his participation of the nature under condemnation, and whom, at the same time, he can accept and raise from the dead on account of his perfect obedience. Such a one, in Christ, he hath set forth to be a propitiation—a meeting-point of peace and reconciliation, through faith in his blood (Rom. 3 : 25). He is thus just, and yet the justifier of every one coming to him in this faith. Christ's death was just ; Christ's resurrection was just ; and for Christ's sake, he forgives everyone who lays hold of his blood-shedding—in being ceremonially buried in his grave—in being baptized into his death (Rom. 6 : 4). There is no other way of approach to the Father, unto life eternal. There is none other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved.

All this is involved in the genealogical line that connects Christ and Adam. Adam brought death into the line, and, from the line Christ removes it, first in himself, and then in all whom he is pleased to accept in the administration of the judgment which God hath placed in his hand. For these, Christ makes request in his capacity of priest over his own house ; and God grants his request for the sake of Christ's own submission to the Father's mighty will in all things.

There is another theme of reflection in the fact that the line does not go beyond Christ. Beginning with Adam, it ends with Christ. There has been no preservation of a genealogical line since his day. Human generation has, since that time, become fused into a common mass, in which no man could trace his pedigree. There must be a meaning in this, as there is in all the works of God. It is not difficult to see a meaning. We see it if we go forward far enough. Go to the end of the thousand years. Go to the time when there is no more

THE LESSON OF THE GENEALOGIES

curse, no more pain, and no more death. Whose name is the "one name" in all the earth? Whose name covers all men—symbolically engraved on every forehead? At whose name does every knee bend and every tongue confess? THE NAME OF JESUS. The population then filling the earth is all in Christ, just as the present population is all in Adam. The race of Adam will have disappeared, except in so far as absorbed and preserved in Christ. Hence there was no need for the preservation of Adam's pedigree after Christ, for all natural pedigree after him is effaced in him; that is to say, it counts for nothing outside of him, and inside of him it is absorbed.

A subordinate, yet important, element in the genealogy relates to David. In the wisdom of God, David's house is chosen as the royal institution of the whole earth for ever. God's covenant with him, which David, as he drew near to the grave, said was "all his salvation and all his desire," had relation to a son whom God should give him, and who should occupy his throne for ever—whose advent upon the scene should be as the light of an unclouded dawn (2 Sam. 7 : 12, 16 ; 23 : 4, 5 ; Psa. 89 : 34, 36 ; Acts 2 : 29). This son was Jesus, as everyone knows who is in the least acquainted with the truth. Now it was important that the line of descent from David should be preserved till the promised son should appear; otherwise a cloud would—in the eyes of men—have lain upon the greatest of the works of God, for how should it have been manifest to men that Jesus was the promised Messiah of the house of David, if the line of descent had been lost or become involved in obscurity? It is a proof of the Messiahship of Jesus, co-ordinate with many infallible proofs, that the genealogy of the house of David ceased to be preserved after his appearance. But there was no need for its preservation after his appearance on any ground, for as the natural heir to David's throne, revived from the dead, and made to live for ever, his existence must always override subsequent genealogy, even if it had been preserved; for who could hope to take the throne with a legal heir ever living? Thus do all the works and ways of God harmonize one with another in all their details.

It remains for us to consider our relation to this glorious one, this child born, this son given, whose name is rightly called "Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." From the position we occupy, we profitably look to him in two ways—as he was, and as he is. The position we occupy is one of trial and self-denial in many ways for his name's sake; and we have need of patience and need of comfort. We get much of both when we look at him as he was. For what do we see? A man despised and hated and dishonoured—a man who stood aloof from the world for his Father's sake—a man who was considered fanatical and worse—mad, demonized, and vulgarly reputed to be under the control of the mythical deity of the Philistines—a man who was poor and without the friendship of the wealthy, and who was finally hounded to death—who came to his end under the most ignominious and heart-withering circumstances possible to human experience. It is difficult for us in the calmness of personal security to realize the overwhelming agony of the closing scene of the Lord's life on the earth;

SEASONS OF COMFORT

cast out, spurned, condemned with the uttermost human hate, and given over to the unbridled sport and brutality of a ruffian Roman soldiery. We catch glimpses of the utter desolation of the bitter hour in the words of the Spirit in the 22nd Psalm, where the sufferings of Christ are portrayed in the form of Christ's personal lament—"My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me . . .? All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. . . . Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet."

It may be asked what comfort can we have in the contemplation of this dark picture? The answer will spring from the heart of every man who has known what trouble is, particularly trouble that has come in the way of righteousness. In time of trouble the heart is liable to be overwhelmed; and is it not at such a time a real comfort to look back and see that the most beloved of all the sons of God was deepest in the pit of affliction? Is it not comforting to hear the words of Christ: "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord"? (Matt. 10:24). "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you . . . If they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you because they know not him that sent me" (John 15:18-21). It only requires the mind to open to these considerations to be enabled to draw from them the most powerful support. If Christ, who was without sin, passed a life of obscurity and unpopularity, ending in the direst calamity, what reasonable ground for complaint or misgiving have we who are blemished with so many shortcomings, if we should have to come through the sharp experience of adversity "for our profit," that we might be partakers of his holiness? So far from ground of complaint, the case stands the other way; there is ground for thankfulness if we come in for a share of that chastisement whereof all the sons of God are partakers. "Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth." This is revealed truth; we cannot get away from it; we shall find it true. Therefore let us prepare to accept it, comforted, however, by the other truths, that the Father pitieth His children, and that He will not put more upon us than we are able to bear—for this also is revealed—but after we have suffered sufficiently for His purpose, will He establish, and strengthen, and settle us.

If we derive comfort from the contemplation of Christ in the past, how unspeakably greater is the comfort we may find in the con-

sideration of what he is and what he will be. ALL power is in His hands (Matt. 28 : 18).—God hath given him “to be head over all things to the ecclesia, which is his body” (Eph. 1 : 22, 23).—God hath exalted him to the glory of His own eternal nature—“angels, authorities and powers being made subject unto him” (1 Pet. 3 : 22). Is there not a mighty comfort in having thus a friend at the Highest Court? For consider : his present exaltation has reference, among other glorious things, to the requirements of his brethren. He is their priest and mediator. “He ever liveth to make intercession for them” according to the will of God (Heb. 7 : 25). He is touched with the feeling of their infirmity ; and having suffered like them—being tempted—he is able also to succour them that are tempted (Heb. 4 : 15 ; 2 : 18). All this means an invisible care-taking and guidance in this present darkness, which must be a source of comfort and confidence to every one whose heart opens in faith to the attested and demonstrated fact.

But if the present friendship of the risen and glorified Christ be a comfort, what words shall tell the consolation afforded by the realization of the fact that he is coming, and that when he comes, he will deliver us from this present evil world, and bruise its whole diabolism under our feet? It is only the weakness of human faculty that ever dims this glorious prospect. The facts are all there, whether we apprehend them or not. They are outside of us ; they are independent of us ; they remain true even if we should faint and fail utterly. The sun shines in the sky even if a man shut up in a dungeon cannot see it and cannot realize it. We are all more or less imprisoned. Darkness covers the earth. We walk by faith and not by sight ; and because we are weak in ourselves, we may falter and grow weary, faith failing to see at all times clearly the things that are promised, and that are pledged, and that are coming. But the sun shines nevertheless. God remains from everlasting to everlasting ; His purpose cannot fail ; His word cannot be broken ; no tarrying can alter it ; no decay of man or failure of human enterprise or perishing of human hopes can affect the root and foundation of the hope that is in Christ. Jehovah’s covenant stands fast ; it is established in the heavens. At the appointed time the wondrous sequel of Christ’s past work on earth will become a fact. Attended by an august and imposing retinue of the angels, he will arrive on the earth at the spot chosen for the purpose ; the dust of his dead will respond to the formative energy of his power, come to awakening form and life again, and come forth ; the hearts of his living disciples will thrill with fearful gladness at the intimation sent abroad ; in their mustering multitudes the living and the (in times past) dead will come to his presence ; the judgment will sit ; the dread secrets of the divine remembrance will be disclosed, and to all will be meted out reward according to their works. Oh, then the gladness of the chosen, who stand victorious on the rock of life eternal, after the toilsome and tearful journey of “Time’s dark wilderness of years” ; and, oh, the unavailing terror of the rejected multitude who depart with reprobation from the presence of the most glorious Son of God, filling the

air for a moment with weeping and gnashing of teeth ! When we ask to which if the companies we desire to belong, there is but one answer from the heart of all men. And there is but one way to realize the wish of the answer in the great day of account, and that way you know : the way of faith ; the way of obedience ; the way of patient continuance in well-doing, holding fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope steadfast to the end.

The Brethren At Colosse

The privilege of possessing Paul's words.—Noble and sweet and pure.—The brethren at Colosse.—Paul's thankfulness for them.—The apostolic reason.—Others.—The love of the brethren not a love for qualities, but because of living addiction to the hope.—Easy and pleasant.—The gladness of the muster.—Unfeigned joy in God in every breast.—What Paul prayed for.—What Paul would have us to be.—A common standard and a common duty.—“Filled with the knowledge of His will.”—Where shall we learn?—The Scriptures alone.—How to transfer it from these documents to the tablets of the heart.—The problem.—“Fruitful in every good work.”—“Fruit unto himself.”—A poor, stunted, blighted age.—“Long-suffering with joyfulness.”—Meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

WHAT a wonderful thing that, after the lapse of eighteen centuries, we have the words of the apostle Paul to read in our midst this morning. We are so familiar with these words that the privilege of possessing them may not at all times strike us as it ought. It is a privilege even from a merely literary and archaeological point of view. But how much greater the privilege becomes when we realize that these words of Paul are not the enunciation of truth “in words which man's wisdom teaches, but which the Holy Spirit teaches,” as Paul testifies in 1 Cor. 2 : 13. What noble and sweet and pure and instructive words they are. Let us follow the drift of some of them in the consideration of the portion read this morning—the 1st chapter of his epistle to the Colossians.

We will not stay to ask anything about Colosse or its inhabitants. Suffice it that this epistle was addressed to that portion of its inhabitants only which he describes in the 2nd verse as “saints and faithful brethren in Christ.” We are interested in what he has to say to this class, because the class exists today, and stands related to the same things. Let us ponder what he has to say to them in words “which the Holy Spirit teacheth.” First, he gives thanks for the brethren at Colosse : “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.” This suggests the question whether the giving of thanks for such a reason belongs to Paul only. Does

it not belong to all Paul's brethren?—of the nineteenth as well as the first century? If we could have any doubt, it must give way before Paul's command to be followers of him (1 Cor. 11 : 1)—and to “pray for one another” and “for all saints.” Therefore let us not forget, in the luxury of our private petitions—and public, too, for the matter of that—that it is an acceptable thing with God that we thank God for one another, and pray for one another—yea, even for our enemies, as Jesus commands.

Let us not omit to notice, however, the ground of Paul's thankfulness for the brethren. It was not merely for their numbers—it was not merely for the increase of men called “brethren.” He had prayed always for them “since we heard of *your faith* in Christ Jesus, and of *the love which ye have* to all the saints; for (or on account of) the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; which (gospel) is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and *bringeth forth fruit*, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.” There is much to ponder here. What is there to be thankful for in brethren who not only show a poor faith, but scarcely show faith at all? And we know how faith is shown according to the Scriptural standard: “I will show thee my faith BY MY WORKS” (Jas. 2 : 18). And what is there to be thankful for in brethren who not only manifest no “love to all the saints,” but no love to any as such—brethren who are “lovers of their own selves,” and interested in other people in so far as other people are likely in some way or other to minister to their advantage, or whose love of others is limited to the love of “friends” in the Gentile sense—the narrow sense—the animal sense? Give us brethren who love the saints *as saints*, and who can wake up to a disinterestedness extreme enough, if necessary, to “lay down their lives for the brethren.” This is the apostolic standard: and no other standard is worth a moment's regard. Paul had no thankfulness for any other kind of brethren. He spoke of others, “even weeping,” as the enemies of the cross of Christ, who minded earthly things (Phil. 3 : 18).

And the love of the brethren which Paul commended was a love entertained by the Colossians “on account of the hope”—not a love cherished for the qualities of individuals as men in the flesh, but a love felt because of their living addiction to the hope of the Gospel. This hope is the bond every way in the “New Testament” system. Men are members of the house of Christ, “if they hold fast *the confidence and rejoicing of the hope* firm unto the end” (Heb. 3 : 6). Men are brethren beloved if they are “partakers of the hope” in which all the saints have their standing before God—the hope of return to the bosom of God from which the race was expelled at the beginning—a hope to be effected in the form and the way made known in the gospel—a hope which is “the hope of Israel.” To love a man who shows no living interest in the hope which is laid up for us in heaven with Christ, who is coming, is not according to the new man, and not according to what was before Paul's mind in this letter. If a man love God, he cannot but be keenly alive to the hope of his

SEASONS OF COMFORT

promised mercy in the day of Christ ; and if a man is dead to this hope, he is dead to God, and, therefore, outside the pale of an active fellowship with those who are alive to both. The admiration of a man's personal qualities, apart from the relation of his sympathies to God, becomes more and more impossible with the new man : for sympathy with God is the first and increasing principle of his mental being. He is not indifferent to personal quality : far from it—odious personal qualities belong to the outer darkness. " If any man say he love God, and walk in darkness, he is a liar " : so says John, and it is true, however shocking such plain speaking may be to modern Gentile sensibilities. The sublimest personal qualities belong only to the circle of divine light and sympathy, and are to be found only there. But there are qualities in the unenlightened natural man, of the educated sort, that are supposed rightfully to call for admiration. Such admiration is faint with the divinely enlightened. The qualities in question do not afford a basis of fellowship, and friendship apart from fellowship is impossible with the spiritual man. Excellent personal qualities, apart from a recognition of God and His will, are in the nature of the majesty of the lion, or the beauty of the rose, or the glory of a sunset—an ephemeral phenomenon, without roots. In few cases are they so beautiful as those : in none are they truly so, for Gentile accomplishments are skin deep : selfish diabolism lurks under all the gloss.

The Colossians loved the saints on account of the hope in which they rejoiced. It is easy and pleasant to indulge this love, where the hope evidently, and without affectation, dwells in the heart. Part of the unspeakable gladness of the muster and assortment of the saints in the day of Christ will lie in the unfeigned joy in God that will glow in every breast. We cannot but be thankful for the number, and the increasing number, of those who rejoice in the hope for its own sake, and who regulate their friendships by this rule, and in whom the hope is bringing forth fruit, as it did also in the Colossians. In the midst of much humiliation and mortification and desolation, it is a source of refreshing and joy. It is a preparation for the day of the manifestation of the sons of God. Such will be no strangers to Paul and Epaphras, when they awake from their slumber of centuries—short and sweet to them. It is the characteristic of the family of God, that they are " all one." Epaphras reported to Paul the love the Colossian brethren entertained for him " in the spirit." This love will be felt by every true modern brother—a love for Paul, but not after the flesh : a love for Paul " in the spirit," even as they love one another, after the spirit, and not after the flesh ; a style of discourse which is all Greek to the children of the flesh, but which is founded in truth for all that. The love of the brethren is not a love entertained for one another as persons (though that element blends) ; it is a love in God—because of God—with God in view—because of his glorious purpose, and with reference to that glorious purpose, which opens out and lights up the future with an endless perspective of glory and comfort and joy in him who is The Rock and Foundation of all. The love that operates from that direction blends with it a

view that is destructive of merely personal love, the view that the present is but a vain show—a fading scene—a passing picture—the flesh a wind that passeth away and grass that withers. Men of merely personal friendships disrelish this aspect of the case, which is truth.

When Paul heard from Epaphras of the love the Colossian brethren bore him in the spirit, he was led more earnestly to pray on their behalf, and to foster benevolent desires towards them. He tells us what these desires were and what he prayed for. This is deserving of our most serious consideration, for in Paul's specifications of his desires for the Colossian brethren, we see a portrait of what we ought to be—in our leading features of all events—and what, therefore, we will be helped to strive after if we realize that they are an inspired apostle's solicitude on our account. Paul's desire and prayer for the Colossian brethren, then, are thus expressed: "That ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (verses 9, 12). What a comprehensive and profound definition of what Paul would have us to be—of what God would have us to be; for Paul was nothing to us apart from the Spirit of God, which was in him. We shall find it profitable to dwell on it for a few moments.

Are we "filled with the knowledge of the Lord's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding"? This is Paul's wish and prayer, and it will be our desire and aim, in so far as we are in sympathy with Paul. To each of us there is doubtless a different measure of attainment in this matter; but to all of us there is a common standard and a common duty of aiming at attainment—a common salvation to be reached—a common fearful looking for of judgment, in case of rejection as out of harmony with the Divine image. There is no mistaking the meaning of the words, "*filled with the knowledge of His will*"—the mind primed with the knowledge of what God has revealed, and possessing it in such a form as to be available for every moment's requirements. Is it not a desirable condition? Is it an unattainable one? The fact of Paul wishing and praying for it forbids the idea of its being unattainable. It is not only not unattainable, but its attainment is imperative in degree. If we are not filled with the knowledge of His will, how can we do it? and if we do not the Lord's will, how can we hope to stand well with our Judge, who has said, "My brethren are they who do the will of my Father"?

Where shall we learn the Lord's will? We do not require to discuss that here. We all agree that the Scriptures alone are able to make a man wise in this respect, and to thoroughly furnish the man of God unto all good works. We are here assembled because of this agreement. What follows? That if we are earnestly in sym-

SEASONS OF COMFORT

pathy with Paul's prayers and desires concerning the brethren, we shall give ourselves to that daily study of the written Word, which will "fill us with the knowledge of the Lord's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." It is impossible in our day that we can otherwise attain to this excellent condition. The knowledge of God's will is stored in a written form. It is latent in these divinely-inscribed documents. How to transfer it from these documents to the tablets of the heart—this is the problem. It is a vital one. Upon our solution depends our whole future. Theoretically, the way to succeed in it is obvious enough: *read what is written*. But to understand a theory and to work it out are two different things. To work out this theory, we must read ponderingly—read regularly—read with earnest desire—read with prayer. And as all wise men avoid whatever acts hinderingly to the result of any difficult or delicate process they may be conducting, the man who aims to have the will of God, as Biblically embodied, inscribed vitally and enduringly on his mind, will avoid all books and occupations and habits and friendships and companions, that tend to erase the Divine writing, or to interfere with the power of the heart to receive it. This may seem a hard saying to some; but none can dispute its wisdom, and none will regret acting in harmony with it, when he comes into the actual presence of life's issues as determinable at the judgment seat. By what other process can we attain to this most precious and most difficult knowledge—the knowledge of *His will*, which is divulged here a little, and there a little, in shades of varying depth throughout the entire course of the Scriptures? The natural mind is inveterately prone to its own notions, prejudices, views, and feelings, which are all as far below divine ideas as the earth is below the sun. It is only by daily contact with divine ideas that human ideas are displaced, and the mind so tinctured with divine thought as to become spiritually minded. This is true of the mere "knowledge of His will," but how much more so of the richness of mental harmony with God expressed in the further words, "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." This ripeness cannot be attained if we give the study of the Scriptures a slack-handed place, or immerse our faculties in the animal excitements connected with the various forms of pleasure in the world, or the light reading which is so prevalent and so blighting. Unless we set our faces resolutely against "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," so rampant in the world universally, it is impossible we can ever attain to the "knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding."

And in what other state of mind can we hope to "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing"? A man who is carnally minded cannot please the Lord; and a man can never attain to any other than this, the natural state, who does not set himself with all diligence to become "filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." "Walking worthy of the Lord" refers to doing, and doing is the finish of all mental process. A man's mind must be in love with the Lord's will before he will do it. Let the mind be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and

spiritual understanding, and he will "walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being *fruitful in every good work.*"

This touches a feature we need to look at strongly. Jesus says, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit"—a figure truly, but one that we may understand. It was a complaint against Israel that he "brought forth fruit *unto himself*" (Hos. 10 : 1). Most people bring forth some kind of fruit ; they do something ; they achieve something ; but as regards the mass of mankind, wherever found, the complaint is the same as against Israel : they bring forth fruit *unto themselves*. All that they scheme and contrive and carry out is for their own benefit. This, God calls *emptiness*, saying "Israel (in bringing forth fruit unto himself) is an *empty vine.*" We could understand this in the case of a fruit-bearing tree we might plant in our garden. Suppose the fruit was never in a pluckable state, and always absorbed into the tree, we should say the tree was useless. It is God's own illustration. Our lives must show fruit brought forth to him ; something done for his sake ; something done because he has required it—and not a little. "Bring forth *much fruit*"—these are Christ's words. "*FRUITFUL in every good work*"—these are Paul's words and Christ's also. They express a much heartier, and more liberal, service to Christ in all things than is reckoned at all necessary or even prudent in our day, when men are so discreet concerning the present life, and so unwise as to the future ; so circumspect towards man and so indifferent towards God ; so careful of human opinion, and so regardless of divine opinion, as to which they have little faith of its existence at all. It is a poor, stunted, blighted age altogether. Even men called saints partake of its characteristics. It is considered a wonderful triumph of righteousness for a man to abstain from doing wrong ; where are the men who emulate Christ who went about doing *good* ? They are not quite extinct ; but they are reckoned among the fools. The day that is coming will show us that wisdom dwelt in their course alone.

Among other things that Paul prayed for the brethren was this, that they might be "strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, *unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness.*" Here is an insight into a mental pattern that belongs only to the system of truth. Human wisdom does not prescribe "long-suffering with joyfulness," but, on the contrary, asks you why you should suffer. It recommends the assertion of your rights, the resentment of your injuries. The strength that comes with the truth ("the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind," as Paul elsewhere expresses it) enables us even to perform this wonder—to "endure grief, suffering wrongfully," which Peter tells us is well-pleasing to God—avenging not ourselves, but rather giving place unto wrath, in the calmness coming with the conviction that God in His own good time will repay all injustice. If it be asked, why should God allow injustice, why should He permit His people to suffer, there will be an abundant answer in the results made manifest in the day of Christ. As God has constituted human nature—and who will say that he could have shown Him a better way?—character cannot be deve-

loped without evil ; patience, and faithfulness, and obedience cannot be brought out and put to the proof without injustice and the temporary triumph of evil. By such means, in these days of darkness, does God help His people to attain to the wisdom that cannot grow in prosperity. In such rough but loving ways (as they will be seen to be when the work is all done) does He make them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Wisdom

Praise of wisdom.—What wisdom is.—Its general use.—A higher conception.—The starry universe.—Wisdom in heaven and earth.—The wisdom of individual practice.—The adoption of right means for the right ends.—What are the right ends?—God knows how the gift of a free will should be used.—He has made it known.—The Bible that wisdom applied.—Beautifully personified as a mentor.—Obvious literal truth.—Wisdom takes shape to us.—The fear of the Lord the first.—The beginning of wisdom.—The fear of the Lord and the fear of man.—Wisdom not in man.—God and wisdom inseparable.—The person of the Eternal Father.—His highest delight.—The first commandment.—An age when God's name is scarcely mentioned except in profanity.—Unscriptural devotionism.—Science atheistically applied.—How the fear of the Lord comes.—Men reap as they sow.—Wisdom not to be attained with a slack hand.—Spoiled at the start.—Continual and studious readers of the Scriptures.—Leaving the Bible unattended to.—The right ending of the whole matter.—Take the right side.

THERE is much praise of wisdom in that part of the Scripture which we are now considering in our daily reading—The Proverbs of Solomon. It is impossible that this praise can be exaggerated. Solomon himself had put the matter to the utmost proof. He tells us in the Ecclesiastes that, having come to great estate, he communed with his own heart, and gave himself “to know wisdom and to know madness and folly,” that he “might see what was that good for the sons of men, which they should do under the heaven all the days of their life” (2 : 3). Whatsoever his eyes desired, he kept not from them, he withheld not his heart from any joy. He gave himself to delights and to great works, and attained to a degree of prosperity and opportunity exceeding all who were before him in Jerusalem. When he had gone through it all, his verdict was “Wisdom excelleth folly as far as the light excelleth darkness” (2 : 13). Now, who can hope to have a better opportunity of testing this matter than Solomon? As he says, “What can the man do that cometh after the king?”

Now, let us realize for a moment what this wisdom is. Our power to respond to Solomon's verdict, and to apply it practically in our lives, will be greatly strengthened by a clear conception of what is meant by this wisdom, which is the "principal thing." We all know the import of the term in its general use. We say there is no wisdom in such and such a plan, or there is a sad want of wisdom in such and such a person : but this is not the wisdom so highly praised by Solomon as a tree of life ; or rather, it is but a very small leaf on that tree—in many cases, a plucked leaf—ay, a withered leaf. We seek for a higher conception when we read, "The Lord by wisdom hath founded the earth ; by understanding hath he established the heavens . . . The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old." We shall seek not in vain if we seek with diligence and with earnest and loving purpose. The scorner seeketh wisdom and findeth it not : the mammon-hunter hunts wisdom in vain. Yet "how much better is it to get wisdom than gold ! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver !" (Prov. 16 : 16).

Wisdom, then, in its most elementary conception, is the power and disposition to adapt means to the accomplishment of good ends. Such an adaptation we see everywhere in nature—in superlative degree—in the most exquisite form—whether we look at matters large or matters small. Who can look at the starry universe without being impressed with the wonderful balancing of stupendous power for the preservation and benefit of every part ? But we do not require to mount the heavens in search of wisdom. "The unwearied sun from day to day" is truly a mighty preacher to "reason's ear," and the moon that walketh in brightness at night, and the stars that glitter in the sky : but we learn the same lesson in much lower flights. Consider the composition of the atmosphere : consider the constitution of the earth : consider the structure of the vegetation that flourishes upon it. Examine the tiniest blade of grass, the meanest insect, the commonest animal : they all exemplify, in the most perfect manner, the adaptation of means to ends—beneficent ends. Yea, this prevailing wisdom is more prevailing still. There are creatures we cannot see : here also, when the microscope makes them visible, we behold the most perfect mechanical contrivances for fulfilling the objects of being. In our own bodies, we carry about a whole world of such contrivances. Our general structure is a masterpiece of wisdom : our constitution in detail is an almost endless series of wise appliances, not to speak of the wonderful apparatus of digestion and assimilation, the fibre of every muscle, the minute vessels of every blood-holding part, yea, the discs in every drop of blood strike the highest intelligence dumb with admiration of the wisdom with which all things have been contrived.

Here is wisdom in heaven and earth : above, below, around, within : yet another idea is evidently wanting to connect this wisdom with the wisdom so much commended by Solomon—the wisdom of individual practice. We find it as we proceed. The wisdom we see in heaven and earth is wisdom mechanically applied—wisdom applied to substances and things which are passive and plastic in the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

hands of Eternal Power. But in man, we have an additional phenomenon—a being made in the image of that Eternal Power—a being endowed with intelligence and volition—a being possessed of a rational will, having the power of choice—the power to do, or not do, as may seem to him the best. Now, the question is, how is this God-like power to be used? Much depends on the answer. It may be used in a way that will bring destruction and misery: it may be used in a way that will bring life and blessing and gladness. Here, as in all other cases, wisdom consists in the adoption of right means for the right ends: but who knows what are the right ends? and who knows what are the right means for reaching those ends? As a matter of fact, man left to himself does not know. This is shown by all his history, and by the universal experience of the present hour. God, who made him, knows. God, whose wisdom is manifest in the sky and in the earth, and in every physical thing that we can know anything about, knows how the gift of a free will should be used so as to lead to the blessedness there is in it when rightly used; and God, who has this knowledge, has made it known to us. And hence it is that what is Scripturally revealed as the right way, is the only practical wisdom for us, and it is here that what is revealed is connected with the wisdom that made heaven and earth. The wisdom that made the one has revealed the other; so that the man who obeys the voice of God, made scripturally audible, is in harmony with the wisdom that has so wonderfully contrived all things around us. The Bible is that wisdom applied to us which gave the bee its constructive talent, and the sun its earth-gladdening light.

To be without this application of Almighty wisdom is to be forlorn indeed. It is to be put out of joint with wisdom everywhere. What boots it to a man that the universe is splendid and great, and full of the arrangements of wisdom, if he himself is at war with that wisdom, as applied to him? Of what advantage that he knows the distances of the planets, the magnitudes of the stellar system, the laws of light and electricity—yea, if he be filled with the knowledge of all natural things—of what advantage is it all to him if he himself know not how to fulfil the object of his existence in creation? It is like a man admiring the sun who is cast away in an open boat at sea without food or water; or praising the productiveness of British soil when he is obliged to wander the streets without a penny to buy a loaf of bread.

The wisdom that made all things has spoken concerning the ways that will lead man to life and peace; and our wisdom—our only wisdom, is to listen and obey. This wisdom is beautifully personified as a mentor thus: “Unto you, O men, I call: and my voice is to the sons of men. O ye simple, understand wisdom: and ye fools, be ye of an understanding heart. Hear, for I will speak of excellent things: and the opening of my lips shall be right things. For my mouth shall speak truth: and wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are in righteousness: there is nothing froward or perverse in them. They are all plain to him that understandeth, and right to them that find knowledge. Receive

my instruction, and not silver ; and knowledge rather than choice gold. For wisdom is better than rubies ; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it " (Prov. 8 : 4-11). Again we read, " Happy is the man that findeth wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding. For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies : and all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared unto her. Length of days is in her right hand ; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her : and happy is every one that retaineth her " (3 : 13-18).

There is much of figure in this, but how much of obvious literal truth is conveyed in the figure. When a man understands, receives, and continuously obeys the instruction and the commandments delivered by divine authority in the Scriptures, and intended for him, he embraces the " wisdom " of this beautiful parabolic discourse, and will certainly realize the pleasant results depicted. When Moses had placed before Israel all the statutes and commandments he was authorized to deliver to them, he said, " Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the Lord my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them : for THIS IS YOUR WISDOM." We, Gentiles (invited to adoption through Christ), are not called upon to obey these Mosaic commandments—but the same voice, the same authority, has appointed to us other commandments, suited to the purposes of the dispensation in which we live. These are the commandments of Christ, who enjoined his apostles to teach all nations to observe them, and who said those only were his friends who kept them. Concerning these, the words of Moses may well be addressed to us, " Keep therefore and do them : for *this is your wisdom.*" Wisdom takes this shape to us : Christ is made unto us wisdom ; in him are filled up all its treasures.

Now, it is testified to us, concerning this personal application of wisdom, that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of it : " The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." We live in a day when nothing more meaningless could be uttered in the general ear. In the common estimation, whether expressed conventionally, educationally, or scientifically, the fear of the Lord, so far from being the beginning of wisdom, is an obstruction to all wisdom—an impediment in the way of obtaining it. To most of us it has doubtless seemed at one time as if this general verdict were a true one. Personally, I can recollect the time (now long gone by) when the statement that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, seemed only so much pious jingle. How different the case seems now. The words are simply true—absolutely true—uncontradictably, scientifically, precisely true, as every man of any true capacity of observation and reflection is bound to discover. Without the fear of the Lord, how is a man to obey commandments which run against the natural grain ? The commandments of Christ forbid us to do many things we like

SEASONS OF COMFORT

to do, as natural men—to retaliate, to avenge ourselves, to hoard up treasure upon earth ; they command us to do things that we do not like to do as natural men—to be patient with the evil, to suffer wrong, to do good to our enemies. How can a man do such things without the motive power—the fear of the Lord ? Experience will show it to be impossible. A man is not to be trusted in the long run who fears not God. He may be kept on the track for a while at the beginning, by the secondary influences that affect all men more or less ; but as these, one by one, get worn away by the friction of time, if the fear of God be not the kernel of his mental composition, he will act the part of the natural man, and do those things only that are agreeable to himself, without reference to what Christ has required at his hands. The fear of man will keep a man straight in many things ; but in times of temptation—when the eye of man has no bearing—when a man is left only to the power of what is in his own heart—if the fear of God be not there, he will go wrong and depart from wisdom to his destruction. “ I fear God,” said Joseph when giving his brethren a guarantee that he would do rightly by them. If a man is not able to say this truly, there is not much reliance to be placed on him. To “ fear God and keep his commandments,” is Solomon’s summary of the whole duty of man. There is no other rule of wisdom or line of safety. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. A man who has not acquired this, has not made a beginning on the road that leadeth unto life.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom in another sense. Wisdom is not in man. Man is only a permitted form of the wisdom-guided power of God—a creature that comes into the world without any knowledge, made by wisdom, but himself without it ; who acquires wisdom by slow and painful methods, if he acquire it at all, and who, when he acquires it, has acquired it all from without, and from that which was before him. Wisdom is of God from eternity. It not only precedes man ; it preceded the earth, and the physical universe. “ The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth ; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth ” (Prov. 8 : 22-25). Thus speaks the personified wisdom of God by the inspired mouth of Solomon. In this sense, God and wisdom are inseparable. Wisdom, or the power and disposition skilfully to adapt means to ends, is the characteristic of the Eternal Father inhabiting unapproachable light, and radiated in boundless immensity. Scriptural praise is “ to God *only wise*.” Wisdom dwells with Him, and intrinsically with Him alone. Now, it is testified, “ He hath made all things for Himself.” Upon earth His highest workmanship is man ; and His highest delight in earth-direction is to receive man’s adoration and obedience. A man who does not fear Him is without interest to Him : a man who disobeys Him is an offence to Him. “ He taketh pleasure in them that fear him, and in them that hope in his mercy.” A man may profit himself by his

energy and skill : but of what profit is he to the Almighty if he fear Him not ? It will turn out at last all in vain if this is lacking : but let a man abound in this, even if lacking in other directions, he is in the way of life, for the approbation of God will secure every good thing in the end. So it is written, " No good thing will the Lord withhold from *them that fear him.*"

The first commandment is : " Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and strength, and mind." Hence nothing acceptable can be offered to God without the fear of the Lord, which is thus the beginning of wisdom.

We stand in much need in such an age as this of remembering this feature of the wisdom which belongs to the house of Christ. We live in an age when God's name is scarcely mentioned except in profanity ; and when there is no more effectual way of earning the reputation of soft-brained folly than to allege the fear of God as a reason for your course in any matter. If God's name is not mentioned in profanity, then it is in the insincerity of cant, which is little better. Between the extravagances of an unscriptural devotionalism on the one hand, and the chilling exactitudes of a science atheistically applied on the other, it is a difficult thing to find and keep the medium path of true wisdom. But such a medium path is to be found ; and happy the man who, finding it, keeps it. The fear of the Lord, which is rational and sincere, is to be found now as it ever has been found. How did men come to fear the Lord in the apostolic or prophetic ages ? Not by inspiration, but by knowledge divinely revealed and acting upon their reason. Men love where they know. Acquaintance is the first condition of friendship. Hence the scriptural injunction : " Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace." This process of acquaintance is further defined as a drawing nigh : " Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you." Again, further, as a seeking : " Seek the Lord while he may be found ; draw nigh to him while he is near." We have no prophet in our midst at whose mouth we may enquire of the Lord. We have no temple to which we can go, and do homage with peace-offering before the manifested presence of Deity. But we have the essence of all these privileges in possessing the Scriptures of the truth. Men could do no more in ancient days than obtain access to the divine mind, and become acquainted with the divine character and the divine will. The most in which they differed from us was that in some cases they could obtain the mind of the Lord in a given dilemma. This was a great privilege. Still, the greater privilege of becoming acquainted with the revealed character of God, His will, His law, His purpose, is equally ours *if we make it so.*

Ah, much depends upon the last five words. Men reap as they sow even now. If we are content with a one-talent knowledge of the truth—if we rest upon that mere outline-knowledge of the Scriptures which leads to the belief and obedience of the gospel—if having become sufficiently enlightened to put on the name of Christ, we thenceforth leave the subject at rest, and devote our energies to other knowledge, and other pleasures, and other cares, we shall never

SEASONS OF COMFORT

attain to that knowledge of God that results in His love and fear ; we shall never become subject to that rich indwelling of the word of Christ which Christ desires in those to be chosen. Wisdom is not to be attained with a slack hand. "Wisdom is the principal thing ; therefore get wisdom : and with all thy getting get understanding." But she is not to be got with less effort than men usually put forth in other gettings. On this point, we have all been more or less spoiled at the start by the loose and unscriptural views that are in circulation in almost all religious communities. It is everywhere represented that salvation is an easy thing ; that, in fact, you have only to allow yourself to be saved ; that you almost put God under obligation in consenting to let Him save you. How contrary to scriptural representations of the matter. Truly, it is "without money and without price" that we are invited to wisdom's feast ; and truly the yoke of Christ is easy, and the burden is light ; but to the feast we must come and stay ; the yoke we must put on and wear. To each of us the Spirit says, "*Incline thine ear to wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding . . . cry after knowledge . . . lift up thy voice for understanding . . . seek her as silver, and search for her as for hid treasure.* Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." The spirit of God in the apostolic writings speaks not differently. Jesus speaks of *striving* (more literally *agonizing*) to enter into the kingdom of God ; and Paul, of "working out our salvation with fear and trembling."

Now to what does all this come in plain language ?—though I do not know that language could be much plainer. Does it not come to this, that we must make ourselves continual and studious readers of the Scriptures ?—readers who aim not only to understand, but, in their actual lives to carry out the principles and the commandments contained therein ? Few would demur to this proposition in the abstract ; but many deceive themselves and others by simply saying "Amen" to the theory, and neglecting to do that which is necessary to carry it out. They praise wisdom in the abstract, but leave her unappropriated and unsought after. They re-echo good words about the Bible, but leave the Bible unattended to. They acknowledge the Bible to be the word of God, but they give the chief place in their lives to the words and the works of man. They give to the affairs and the friendships of this present life the best of their vigorous attention with the rising of every sun ; but a daily attention to the unfading life to come, in the daily reading of the Scriptures, sinks either to a languid or a neglected performance, or, worse still, to a performance that they oppose or speak deprecatingly of, as of questionable utility.

Brethren and sisters, as you value the right ending of the whole matter ; as you value the verdict, at the end of the journey ; as you value the satisfaction of an approving conscience ; as you value the sweetness of an acquaintance with wisdom ; as you value the friendship of Almighty God for mortal man ; as you value an immortal life when our present shadowy days upon earth shall have run ; as you value a joyful harvest from a bountiful seed sowing ; as you

value the haven of rest in the kingdom of God, when the toil and the conflict of present probation are over, take the right side on this question. Leave to themselves the mistaken men who preach smooth things. Make yourselves one with the men after God's own heart, who have said, "Oh how love I Thy law. It is my meditation all the day. Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. How sweet are thy words unto my taste, yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth . . . I esteem the words of Thy mouth more than my necessary food."

To such, the wisdom of heaven and earth thus speaks : "Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors. For whoso findeth me findeth life, and shall obtain favour of the Lord ; but he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul : all they that hate me love death."

The Antidote To Spiritual Distemper

Spiritual distemper not uncommon.—The antidote.—Paul's apostleship.—Paul spoke the truth.—Glooms and fears that paralyze the heart and arm.—Facts and impressions at variance.—The coming day a fact.—Life as it now is but an appearance.—Going back far enough.—Christ in the land of the living.—Hope and joy and gladness unutterable.—What God has spoken.—Fit to make the heart leap for joy.—Present things concerning the brethren of the Lord Jesus.—"The Father Himself loveth you."—Chastisement.—The grand coming reversal.—"The unsearchable riches of Christ."—We shall all be changed.—A living illustration of what a spiritual body is.—Not fairy tales.—Feelings not to be trusted.—Apostrophe to our poor, weak, stupid heart.—The goodness of the salvation propounded by the apostles.—The only reality.—"There is that changes not."—Not following a shadow.—The word of the Lord fulfilling before our eyes.—Death sends us by a very quick road.—The bustling thousands of the Lord's risen friends.

THERE is an antidote in the chapter read this morning (Gal. 1) to a spiritual distemper which is not uncommon in the present state of things upon earth, and from which we are ourselves liable to suffer. We have all, probably, at one time or another, heard the remark made concerning the truth, that it is a good and a glorious thing in itself, as regards the prospect it holds out, but that is simply too good to be true—that it belongs to the idyllic conceptions of mankind—that, in short, it is a beautiful dream, which will never be realized in this woe-stricken planet. Perhaps, at times, in moments of weakness (and most of our moments are moments of this sort), we ourselves have felt like this—not that the feeling has shaped itself distinctly, not that it has been an idea we would at all own, but we have had a dim, scarcely-definable fear that, after all, "the unsearchable riches of

SEASONS OF COMFORT

Christ" would for ever remain merely a matter of discourse—that the golden consolation that glows before the jaded spirit, on the horizon of Bible-illuminated hope, would never come near in the "joy unspeakable" of actual realization.

This is the distemper to which the chapter furnishes the antidote. The very first verse gives us the antidote: "Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)." Paul's apostleship—Paul's gospel—Paul's hope—"not of men, neither by man," but of Christ—of God! As he says, in verse 11, "I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is *not after man*: for I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." If the hope of the gospel be a matter resting not at all on man, but on God, we have to ask both the critical Satan and our diabolical selves, "How can it be too good to be true? How can it fail of accomplishment?" To this there is no answer but one. Even the adversary is compelled to say, "If the thing is of God, doubtless it will be as good as He says." The adversary, while he says this, has a reservation in his heart. He says, "Is the thing of God?" He is sufficiently answered to say to him, "Search and see." We are of those, this morning, who have searched and seen, and who have come to the only conclusion admissible in the premises: that Paul spoke the truth when he uttered the words we have read from this chapter.

Consequently, brethren and sisters, it is our privilege this morning to draw the fullest comfort that such a conclusion is capable of yielding. To do this, it is necessary to turn upon ourselves, and criticise ourselves, for we are in ourselves the most dangerous foes we have. Our gloom and fears that paralyse the heart and arm, are far more formidable to the new man begotten within us, than the opposition of ten thousand braggart foes. We have to look these glooms and fears in the face and diagnose them. Whence are they? Are they not the sensations of mortal brain and nerve? Why should they be regarded in estimating facts substantiated to the reason? Is it not the fact that we are impressionable creatures of circumstances? When the morning breaks and we see the sun emerge on the eastern horizon, we feel that he rises: we know as a matter of mathematical demonstration that he moves not from his place. As we walk the solid earth, we feel that it is fixed while we know that it moves. We feel that the sky is up and the earth down, while, as a matter of fact, the overhead heavens of noonday are beneath our feet at night, there being neither up nor down except in our sensations—very real to us, no doubt, but not attributes of the universe. Many other matters might be mentioned in which facts and impressions are at variance, and have to be brought into harmony by reason. At night, it seems as if the day would never return, but it comes for all that.

In no matter is impression and fact more inconsistent than in this matter of the day of Christ. The night prevails with such intensity of darkness and cold that it seems as if the day were a dream: but the coming day is a fact for all that. It does not depend upon our feelings. Life as it now is—in its feebleness, its pettiness, its mal-

arrangement every way, seems permanent ; but a very small exercise of reason suffices to show it is but an appearance. We step backward but a short distance, and where were we and the people we know, and the town we inhabit ? Absolutely non-existent. We step forward a similar distance, and what do we see with mathematical certainty but this, that all these things that exist before our eyes, and exercise our minds in various ways, must cease to exist ? We can see this without the aid of the truth at all. Yet the impression of the moment is that these things are very real and abiding. When we can see this much in matters common to all men, does it not become easier to estimate the verities of things appertaining to Christ ? He does not seem to exist ; but we know he exists. His coming does not seem as if it would happen ; but we know it will happen, as a thing not depending upon appearances. His kingdom does not seem as if it would ever be more than a talk upon earth ; but we know the fact is contrary to the appearance. We know it by the application of our reason ; and reason, fed by the materials furnished in the Scriptures, can be quite positive in the presence of the most unpromising appearances.

We have only to work sufficiently far backward to discover the grounds of a conviction very different from that created in the mind by a careless observation of current facts. Going back far enough, at a time when British life was as yet unknown under the sun, we come upon Paul in the land of the living ; the apostles in the land of the living ; Christ in the land of the living ; the Jews in the land of their habitation ; further back, Daniel at the court of Nebuchadnezzar ; David on the throne of his glory ; Moses in the camp of Israel on the march from Egypt ; Abraham receiving the promises, and the test of his faith in them ; Noah upborne on the face of the world-destroying waters ; Enoch and Abel pleasing God in a day when men were few, and human life a purer and a nobler thing than in this crowded modern era. When these facts of the past come into sight, they yield, in logical construction, a conclusion very different from that which is forced upon fools by the loud-voiced glaring facts of the present. They tell us, in their combined interpretation, that " God at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, and did in the last days of Judah's commonwealth speak by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things," " whereof he hath given assurance unto all men in that he hath raised him from the dead." Telling us this, they bring hope, and joy, and gladness unutterable to the heart, in the midst of the surrounding desolation : for God has spoken things many and glorious fit to make the heart leap for joy. He has declared His purpose to spread on the desolate hill of Zion, " a feast of fat things for all people"—fat things indeed, for " He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. 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 " (Isa. 25 : 6). He has declared that He will set His king on that holy hill of Zion,

SEASONS OF COMFORT

in pursuance of the covenant made with David to give him a son to sit upon his throne, reigning and prospering, executing justice and judgment in the earth (Psa. 2 : 6 ; 89 : 34-6 ; Jer. 23 : 5 ; Acts 2 : 30) ; whom all peoples, nations, and languages shall serve and obey (Dan. 7 : 14) ; in whose days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, so long as the moon endureth (Psa. 72 : 7) ; a king who shall be as a hiding place from the wind, a covert from the tempest, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land (Isa. 32 : 2) ; who shall rise as the light of a cloudless dawn upon earth, full of joy and blessing (2 Sam. 23 : 4). Such, and many more great and precious promises, hath Jehovah spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets which have been since the world began, and His word cannot fail. "There are many devices in a man's heart ; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand."

And consider, besides, these glorious things spoken of Zion—consider what God hath spoken by Christ concerning Zion's sons—concerning the brethren of the Lord Jesus, among whom we aspire and labour to be included. He has spoken things concerning the present, and concerning the future, which are full of comfort—which we have but effectually to call to mind, to be filled with "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Concerning the present, he says, "The Father himself loveth you." "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him." "He careth for you." What comfort there is in these facts. What though He suffer evil to befall ? So He did to His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased. What if He appoint chastisement in stripes that sometimes seem beyond our poor endurance ? It is that we may be partakers of His holiness. What if He leave us among those who are despised, who are poor, who weep, who inherit meanwhile evil things ? It is that we may stand well in that grand coming reversal, when those who mourn shall be comforted ; when those who are despised shall be crowned with glory and honour ; when those who are poor shall enter upon the possession of the hoarded riches of the sinner ; when those who are without a portion shall inherit all things.

On all these testified things we are justified in relying, if we are the subjects of a Scriptural repentance toward God and an obedient faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. They are matters of present, though secret, dispensation of the divine hand towards us, leading us to confidence and peace even in these the days of our vain life. But what shall we say about those other testified things—those things future—those things not yet seen, which God hath laid up in store for those who please Him ? Christ has spoken them : the apostles have re-echoed them by his authority. They are no cunningly devised fable. Surrender to them in the fulness of their power, to cheer, encourage, and strengthen in this warfare with evil. They cannot be defined in their true excellence. Paul speaks of them as "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory," and of the worst sufferings of the present as "our light affliction which is but for a moment, not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." He declares them "the unsearchable riches of Christ." By the side

of them, he says he accounts all things but dung. His ardour of expression is warranted by the subject. Consider them in their simplest enunciation : " This is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." " I give my sheep eternal life, and *they shall never perish.*" " They shall come forth to the resurrection of life." " Because I live, ye shall live also." " I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you."

We cannot exhaust the goodness and glory of these promises—of these assured prospects of the brethren of Christ. We are favoured to know plainly what they mean : that we shall *all be changed*—changed in our physical, our material, our actual nature, for " as we have born the image (partaken of the nature) of the earthy (the nature of the first Adam), we shall also bear the image (partake the nature) of the heavenly (the nature of the last Adam). " *This corruptible* must put on INCORRUPTION : *this mortal* must put on immortality." " He shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned *like unto his glorious body.*" His glorious body has been exhibited to witnesses whose testimony has been authenticated to us by " God bearing them witness with wonders and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit." They saw his glorious body shown beforehand on the mount of transfiguration : " His face did shine as the sun : his raiment was white as the light." Paul saw him several years after his ascension, and the light of his person was " above the brightness of the sun." He is a living illustration of what a spiritual body is—a body living, not by blood, but by the incharged presence of the primal life-power of God in every atom—a body incorruptible in substance, glorious in aspect, powerful in faculty, honourable and holy in all its functions—perfect in its enjoyments.

These are not fairy tales ; they are sober facts. It looks not like it now. We know life only in connection with the weak, earth-cleaving, unclean, and dying nature of present experience, and we are liable to droop under that knowledge. " We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened." We find life a cloud, a vanity, a vexation of spirit : and looking through the smoky atmosphere of our feelings, we see but darkly and faintly. But these feelings are not to be trusted. This is the lesson we have to learn. We are so to exercise our senses on these things as to be able to say to ourselves whenever there is need, " Get thee behind me, Satan." There is often need for this ; and if we are not ready when the need comes, Satan (our own poor weak nature) is liable to get the upper hand, and sit upon us like a great nightmare, almost suffocating the spiritual man. The glorious truth is just as outside and independent of us as the sun in the heavens. Whether we are weak or strong, it is there all the same. It does not in any way depend upon our strength to bring it about. It rests on God's purpose, and not on our skill. It subsists in its own nature, even when our power to realize it is eclipsed in death itself.

Say not in thine heart, " It is too good ever to be realized." Rather look into thine heart, and say, Poor, weak, stupid heart, thou art considerable of a fool. Thou thinkest thyself wise in judging by

SEASONS OF COMFORT

what thou hast felt and seen during seventy years or so, or hast read of for a longer time : knowest thou not that the longest time that man has been upon the earth, is but as one tick on the great clock of the *aion* of God, who is from everlasting to everlasting ? Why should thy brief moment be a standard wherewith to judge the ages ? Thou thinkest thyself prudent in estimating existence by the sensations of thy marred and mortal humanity : knowest thou not that there was life before thy life ? power before thy puny strength ? wisdom before thy blundering skill ? songs and satisfaction before thy wintry joy ? Why should thine afflicted experience be the measure of the best that can be ? Look around on heaven and earth : canst thou not see the evidence everywhere—yea, the manifest form of unbounded strength, wisdom, joy, and power ? Do you mean to say that mortal man is the best that Creation's strength and wisdom can produce ? Know ye not that Creation's strength and wisdom is the God revealed to Israel—the “ everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, who fainteth not, neither is weary, and there is no searching of his understanding ” ? Hush your foolish tongue : open your weak eyes, and look up at the glorious light that has come to the Gentiles—the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ—the promise of life everlasting in the ages to come, wherein He will show the exceeding riches of His kindness in Christ Jesus towards such as honour Him before the sons of men. He means to do better than you have seen. Listen to the explanation of our present weakness and vanity : accept joyfully the goodness of the Father's intention to reconcile all things to Himself, and to fill the earth with life, and peace, and glory. Walk courageously in the joy of the divine purpose, and listen no longer to the whinings and maunderings which are but the aberrations of an intellect weakened and destroyed by the frailty of perishing human nature.

No, the goodness of the salvation propounded by the apostles, which excites the incredulity of men who flatter themselves on their superior shrewdness, is only another evidence of its divinity. Man could not have conceived so great a goodness : and, coming from God, we should expect it to be the highest goodness. Our business, this morning, is to open our hearts to it. It is the only reality there is for us. Nothing else is abiding. Our days upon earth are as a shadow. Our affairs are constantly on the move. Fifty years make a wonderful difference. Fifty years, apart from the Lord's coming, will see most of this assembly in the grave. Fifty years will see all the children, if they survive life's tempest so long, grown to be elderly men and women, “ in the sere and yellow leaf,” with hair silvered, and faces wrinkled with care. Fifty years will see the joys and anxieties of the present hour gone for ever. Change is our portion now, as we have been singing, but, “ there is that changes not.” Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and for ever. Where is our wisdom, then, but in keeping this truth constantly before our eyes ? Let us fight against appearances. Let us resist the deception of our senses. Let us nail up as our motto : “ We have here no continuing city—we seek one to come.” And remember that our seeking is no uncertain seeking.

THE ANTIDOTE TO SPIRITUAL DISTEMPER

We are not as them that beat the air. We are not following a shadow. We are not nursing an illusion. The words of the Lord are words of truth and soberness. Christ has risen. That is the foundation on which the edifice of our hope is built. It is a foundation that cannot be shaken. It is a fact that speaks to us from all past history, and from the events of the present hour. The sure word of the Lord is fulfilling before our eyes.

Behold Israel, after ages of dispersion, turning their eyes to the land of their fathers. Behold the land after a desolateness of "many generations," preparing to receive back her long-scattered children. Behold a man uprisen to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. Behold this developing situation showing itself at the very time fore-shown to Daniel the prophet. Ponder well its significance to the household of faith. Recognize the tokens of that coming again of the Beloved Master—Oh! how beloved!—which has been the hope and the prayer of all the saints since Paul was sent forth to form Christ in them the hope of glory. We know not at what hour the Master will arrive; we only know he is due towards day-break, and we see the faint grey streaks on the horizon, the first token of morn. Our long waiting will end at last. We patiently endure like Abraham, but it will not always be endurance. The time will end, the vision will speak, the Lord will come, and the angels of his power will apprise us of the glad event, and conduct us to his presence; if with fear because of our unworthiness, yet with the confidence inspired by Jehovah's own declaration: "They shall not be ashamed that wait for me." "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."

And what if the fears of the old, concerning this time of the end should be realized? What if death should overtake them, or any of us, at our post, and lay us among the sleepers before the joyful hour? Do we suffer thereby? Far otherwise. There is no loss, but gain. We shall only find ourselves all the sooner where we want to be; for death sends us by a very quick road to the judgment seat. The dead know no time, any more than the unborn. Therefore we may think very comfortably concerning the whole subject every way. The Lord stands a very short way onwards on our path at the worst. A little longer waiting; a little longer patient continuance in well doing; a little longer endurance of the bleak present evil world, and all will be over, and our eyes, by death or the Lord's arrival, will open upon the scene which the gospel has planted deep in our affections. God grant that in that scene—alive with the bustling thousands of the Lord's risen friends—we may find ourselves welcomed as fellow-citizens of the household of God.

Why We Break Bread

Why we meet for the breaking of bread.—Jesus has commanded.—His commandments binding.—The works he did bear witness.—The nature of them.—The display of power in the hands of the apostles.—The testimony which the miracles were intended to confirm.—Christ rose from the dead.—The part of reason.—What Christ was in himself.—There never was such a man before.—Look through the ages.—Philosophy all wrong.—We need not justify our action.—Confirmation of faith.—Three great departments in which we experience need.—The intellect.—Supreme desire after the highest knowledge.—The faith of Christ satisfies the highest intellectual capacity.—Deeper than fact we cannot go.—Our next need.—“Moral.”—What science tells us.—The effect, slow freezing through all society.—The original animalism.—The faith of Christ appeals to every motive of self-control.—Powerful stimulus of hope.—The influence of fear.—A divine tribunal.—Peace unknown in the ways of folly.—The faith appeals to our whole nature.—A place for God and for Christ in our natural constitution.—The vanity of the present evil world.—Meetings for the remembrance of Christ sweeter than any other meetings.—Our last need, physical.—We need renovation.—Here Science makes no pretences.—No promise in the direction of human wisdom at all.—The faith of Christ meets our need.

WHY do we meet here every first day of the week for the breaking of bread? and why do we find so much pleasure, so much profit, in the exercise? Very much is involved in the answer of these questions. We meet here because Jesus of Nazareth has commanded it; and we regard his commandment as binding, because the works he did bear witness, in every reasonable construction of them, that God sent him and gave him power over all flesh to carry out the will of God, as he said. Those works were not mere works of goodness: they were works of power—works of a kind to compel even Nicodemus, “a man of the Pharisees, a ruler of the Jews,” to say, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” Those must have been extraordinary works which, in the space of three short years and a half, enabled an unknown artisan, from the hills of uncultured and reputationless Galilee, to fill the country with his fame, and bring upon him the combined opposition of Jewish and Roman authorities. They were works to which Jesus himself appealed, saying, “The works that I do bear witness of me that the Father hath sent me . . . If ye believe not me, believe the works. . . . If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin.” The nature of them is plainly indicated in the reply of Jesus to the messengers of John the Baptist, when John was in prison: “Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that

the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached."

These works by themselves were evidence sufficient of Christ's authority to deliver binding commandments, even if there had been no faith-compelling sequel in the work of the apostles; but there are other reasons why we should say with the disciples that he is "Master and Lord." He was crucified after steadily foretelling during his ministry that he would be so. Even had the matter stopped there, we should have had reasons for confidence that it would have been difficult to throw off. But after his enemies had triumphed in his crucifixion, a greater display of power than ever took place in the hands of his disciples and friends: a display intended to have a certain significance—taught by Christ beforehand to have a certain significance—alleged by the apostles to have a certain significance. Christ said, "Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you, *and ye shall be witnesses unto me.*" The apostles words were: "*We are his witnesses*, and so also is the Holy Spirit, that God hath given to them that obey him." Paul's words are: "God also bearing them witness, with signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit." The significance of the display of power that took place in the hands of the apostles was that God, who only could impart such power, was bearing witness, by means of it, to the truthfulness of the testimony of the apostles. The apostles could not have done such things as they did by their own power. They could not heal multitudes of sick folk with a word, open the eyes of the blind, cure the deaf, and actually raise the dead, which they did. They disclaimed the power altogether: "Why look ye on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" They could declare what they knew to be true, but they could not work miracles. They declared what they knew to be true about Christ, but God wrought the miracles (Acts 19: 11); they delivered the testimony which the miracles were intended to confirm. What was the testimony? In what bearing were they Christ's "witnesses" as he said they would be? Here is the glorious matter; here is the point that settles all controversy, and puts an end to all doubt. They testified that God had raised Christ; and they delivered this testimony as a matter of personal eye-witness. They had seen him many days, and eaten and drunk with him, and talked with him, after he rose from the dead. Being the testimony of a number of men, and not of one man merely, and the testimony of men whose writings show them capable, and whose perseverance in the face of opposition shows them trustworthy; and above all the testimony of men, with whom "the Lord worked, confirming the word with signs following" (Mark 16: 20)—it follows in inevitable logic that their testimony was true, and that Christ rose from the dead.

If Christ rose from the dead, we do right to call him Master and Lord, and to obey his commandments: for none but God could raise a dead man from the grave, and this resurrection of Christ is proof to all men that he is God's beloved Son, whom men are to hear

SEASONS OF COMFORT

(Matt. 17 : 5), and by whom God will in due time judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17 : 31), of which in fact, it is an intended pledge, as the last testimony informs us. Consequently, we only act the part of reason in meeting here every first day of the week to call him to remembrance, as he appointed. Any other course is the part of ignorance, or presumption, or madness : and from such a course, only ruin and death can result.

There are other reasons, if we required them. Christ himself—what he was in himself, apart from all extraneous aspects of the case—is quite sufficient to carry conviction with every mind capable of true reflection. Who can explain such a man apart from the record that he is the Son of God ? There never was such a man before or since. Look all through the ages, search every history, ransack every literature, and you will find no figure that can stand by the side of Christ—a man of whom his enemies bore witness that “ he spake as never man spake ”—a man who combined such humility of deportment with such sublime self-assertion ; such compassion for the erring with such intolerance of the wicked ; such incorruptible fidelity to truth with such commiseration for human weakness ; such zeal for God with such kindness for man ; such abnegation of self-consequence with such proclamation of self-greatness ; such adroit independence of speech to his enemies with such sweet and condescending simplicity of language to his disciples ; such fire with such meekness ; such austerity with sociality and kindness ; such greatness with such lowliness ; such dignity and power with such tenderness and benignity. There never was his like before him, as he stands displayed in the consummate narrative of the “ gospels ” ; and there has never been his like since. He stands apart from all men : great, holy, harmless, undefiled. How is this ? If he be but the mere son of Man, as all men are, why was he such a man ? Why have we not such a man now ? Why a Christ 1,800 years ago and no Christ now ? Ye unbelievers, is it not one of your maxims that “ like causes produce like effects ” ? Are not the causes at work now, according to your theory of things, the very same causes that were at work then : and why then can there be no Christ ? Alas, your philosophy is all wrong. As a matter of common sense, your reading of Christ is a hopeless mistake, if indeed you trouble to read him at all. There must be an explanation of the appearance of such a man which is not to be found in the case of any other ; and there is. He is the Son of God. He was not the son of Joseph, though the son of Joseph’s wife. The Holy Spirit overshadowing a virgin of the house of David has produced for us this likeness of God—this manifestation of the Father, the Creator of Heaven and Earth. This explains all and satisfies all our need in the case. It enables us to feel we are doing a wise and a good thing in breaking bread and drinking wine in celebration of his death “ until he come.”

But, dear brethren and sisters, we need not justify our action this morning. We but glance for the confirmation of faith, and the strengthening of works, at the manifest tokens of the truth that the apostles in preaching, and we in believing, have not followed

cunningly devised fables, but stand on the rock of unassailable truth—truth exactly suited to our need on all points which human wisdom is not. There are three great departments in which we experience need. There is first the intellect, or that which has to do with the acquisition of knowledge; the perception of truth; the furnishing of the understanding. Human science can do something for us here; but it does not do enough. It appeals to the lower range of the intellectual faculties only. It gives us facts of a proximate character—facts limited—facts mechanical—facts on the surface. It shows us experiments and apparatus and collections of natural objects. It invites us to look at chemical solutions, and affinities, and combinations, and at facts arranged and labelled with a tedious and burdensome nomenclature. But this does not meet our highest intellectual need. We crave to know the ultimate and highest and universal reason of things. We aspire after the infinite. The human understanding opens with supreme desire after the highest knowledge; yearns to link itself with the universal—the eternal. Science fails here. It can give us facts in the lower range, but only guesses and theories in the higher, and in the highest, refuses us even the consolation of a theory: it chills and discourages us with the word “unknowable.”

The faith of Christ mocks us not so. The faith of Christ gives us the highest knowledge, which we cannot reach by nature, leaving us to our own resources in the lowest. It tells us of the Father in heaven, as the First, and the Eternal, filling heaven and earth by the invisible energy of his irradiant Spirit, constituting an eternal and universal unit, out of which all things are, and in which all things subsist. It thus satisfies the highest desire of the highest intellectual capacity with which man is endowed. That it gives us something the intellect cannot grasp, is no drawback to the satisfaction—rather the contrary. An infinite that we could measure would not be infinity; knowledge and power that we could fathom would not give us the intellectual rest and satisfaction that come with the knowledge of the great and unsearchable first, and only, and all-embracing Power, who is the Father in universe-filling immensity, yet heaven-enthroned personal glory—Creator of all things—the God revealed to Israel by the name Yahweh-Elohim. What if we understand not? The revelation and the demonstration of *the fact* is all we need. Deeper than the fact we cannot go, and will cease trying to, as we grow older and wiser. We do not understand the operation of our own mentality, yet we know it is a fact, and use and enjoy it, without distracting our brains in the vain attempt to realize to ourselves the inscrutable process of mental action. That we cannot understand God is no barrier to our enjoyment of Him, but is rather an ingredient in the supernal sweetness of faith, and the satisfactoriness of a boundless action of the mind upwards.

Our next need is that which relates to motive—or the class of considerations expressed by the word “moral.” Here it is stating the case correctly to say that the faith of Christ does everything, and the

SEASONS OF COMFORT

wisdom of man nothing. Science tells us, with a quiet grimness, and with a very pronounced logical emphasis, though its votaries would not own to the doctrine in its frank enunciation, that the best thing we can do is to do the very best we can for ourselves, of which we are to be the sole judges as to what that is. It practically assures us that this life is the only life we shall ever have, and that in the end, it is a matter of very small moment how we may choose to live, act, speak, feel, or think. What is the effect of such a doctrine? You see it in the slow freezing that is going on through all society. It cannot be otherwise. Let a man once embrace such a doctrine, and he is powerless in the presence of the forces that originally characterize all men at the bottom. Those forces will work up from the bottom of the constitution, and establish themselves in a brutal if refined indifference to all interests but his own. Men become selfish under such an influence. Their selfishness is only tempered by the need for conciliating their fellow-men, upon whose good graces they may depend for the accomplishment and achievement of personal interests. This need for conciliation may give politeness and consideration, but it is only skin deep, and will disappear when it is no longer needed, as when a man makes a fortune and retires. The original animalism will certainly assert itself in the long run, when the sense of responsibility and futurity is withdrawn. Under such a wisdom, all nobility of character must disappear, and man become a prey to the powerful instincts of self-interest that lie like chained beasts of prey in every heart that is under wise control.

How complete is the contrast between the wisdom of man and the faith of Christ! The reflecting mind instinctively realizes it at every point. The faith of Christ appeals to every motive of self-control, and induces and strengthens every effort at the attainment of all that can possibly be noble in human character. It tells us that this life is not all—that this is but a stepping-stone to a beyond—a preparation for things to come after, that will realize every aspiration of the human heart, and rectify every wrong experienced in the present state. It brings to bear the powerful stimulus of hope—hope of perfect good to come; yet, the influence of fear—the fear of Christ's displeasure—the fear of rejection from his presence. It purifies with the prospect of a divine tribunal, at which our whole life will be made manifest in its true and actual character, and in its just and unerring issues. It opens and expands the heart with the adoration of God in fear and love of Him continually. It constrains to deeds of righteousness and mercy, when motive for both would fail if we were left to the impulses of a decaying and self-concerned nature. Noble impulse felt in ardent youth subsides with the advance of age, and with the increase of vain experience. Nothing but the fear of God will keep it alive to the end of the day; because this brings with it a motive totally independent of our own feelings, or the attractiveness of our surroundings. The spirit of obedience—the spirit of hope—the spirit of reverence—the spirit of love towards God and the Lord Jesus Christ, will bear us through all the weakness and discouragements of human experience, and keep us steady in that patient con-

tinuance in well-doing which God will honour at the last in the bestowment of everlasting life.

In these exercises, there is a peace and a joy that are unknown in the ways of folly. Paul might well say that godliness hath promise of the life that now is as well as of that which is to come. With all its drawbacks, a life of faith is a happier life than that of the unreflecting hunters of pleasure. Our experience of these meetings around the table of the Lord is somewhat of a proof on this point. There are many comings together of human beings ; but none ever takes place that so engages the whole man, that so soothes and satisfies the heart, as this meeting to celebrate "the love of our departed Lord." What is the cause ? There is a reason. The faith of our Lord Jesus Christ appeals to our whole nature, and touches the highest chords in the mental man. This is not so with other things. A meeting to listen to fine music, to hear a lecture on a special topic, to discuss a grievance, public or private, to promote the interests of some particular class—to do anything else that men everywhere are in the habit of assembling to do—touches but a small part, and in most cases, the inferior part of the mental man. Whereas, the loving and obedient remembrance of the Lord Jesus kindles the whole and the highest powers of our elohistic-imagined nature. There is a place for God and for Christ in our natural constitution. The highest organs of the brain crave them, and run to waste without them. This place is empty in all worldly schemes and activities : hence the vanity, the vacuity, the unsatisfactoriness of every occupation men pursue in the present evil world. There can be no peace where God is not. The constitution of things cannot allow of it. You might as well look for life without oxygen. The constitution of things is on the side of the faith of Christ. The finger of God is visible in our present organization. The way of folly is a way of misery and destruction, even now ; the way of reverence, of love, of faith, of obedience, of hope, is the way of peace and joy, even in the present mortal nature. This is why the meetings for the remembrance of Christ are sweeter than any other meetings are, or can be. No such sweetness can be found in the way of human wisdom. Blight, barrenness, and darkness only are experienced in any way that excludes God, our refuge, and Christ our everlasting hope.

Our other need—our last need—in a sense, our greatest need—is physical. We are burdened with a weak ineffective nature, which is slowly, but infallibly, tending deathwards, and which obstructs the mental man in his upward flights. We need renovation. We need the introduction of some element of power into our organization that will give vigour, efficiency, endurance. We yearn for perfection and immortality. It needs not to be said how powerless to help in this direction, is all the wisdom and the skill of man. Science makes no pretences in this direction. It says, mortal we are, and mortal must remain, so far as it can see. The faith of Christ steps in and says, "Jesus Christ hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." It gives us in him an illustration of what this means, as well as a pledge of its applica-

bility to our case. "He that raised up Jesus from the dead shall raise us up also by Jesus" (2 Cor. 4 : 14). "He shall quicken your mortal body" (Rom. 8 : 11). "He shall change our vile body"; "This mortal shall put on immortality"; "Immortality shall be swallowed up of life." There is no mistaking the meaning of these simple, but precious statements. They mean that emancipation which we require from the bondage of this corruptible nature—an emancipation of which there is no promise in the direction of human wisdom at all—a prospect which comes with the faith of Christ alone.

Well may we hold on to the faith of Christ with all the tenacity of fully-formed and reasonable determination. There is no hope in any other direction. If Christ be not the Saviour, there is no Saviour. We look in vain in any other direction for the excellency appertaining to the faith of Christ. We need not look in any other direction. It is not only that on all points the faith of Christ meets our need; it is not only that it is exactly the thing we need; but we are able to go further and say, that in the state of the evidence, it is true and genuine and actual beyond all possibility of its being anything else. What the apostles saw and heard, that they declared to men and brethren everywhere over eighteen centuries ago, that all hearing and believing, might reach the wondrous fellowship of the Father of Light through the glorious Son of His love. The lapse of time makes no difference to the position of truth. Therefore are we here this morning to appropriate and rejoice in the glorious things which God hath testified of His Son.

Doing The Will Of God: Comfort to the Faint-Hearted

The will of God.—What is meant.—Various elements and ingredients.—One of them.—A very religious nation.—Isaiah directed to lift up his warning voice.—Pitiful hearts and deeds of mercy.—Character that God desires to see in His children.—A lost truth.—Faith without works dead.—A high standard.—Result beautiful.—A day of gladness.—A faint-hearted brother refuses comfort.—Apparent paradoxes.—The right answer.—A New Testament truth evangelically misapplied.—Trust misplaced.—Resting too much on forgiveness.—Habitual disobedience.—A great mistake.—Conditional nature of forgiveness.—Who the disciples were for whom Christ prayed.—Men earnestly in love with Christ.—Christ's mediation.—The day of glorious cleansing.—The signs of the Lord's coming.—The Commandments of Christ.

No one can attentively read the apostolic writings without being struck with the frequency and the prominence of "the will of God." Jesus refers to it often in his discourses, and says plainly that the doing

DOING THE WILL OF GOD : COMFORT TO THE FAINT-HEARTED

of this will is the rule by which his friends will finally be selected. So distinctly was it before his mind, that those only who did the will of his Father would finally be chosen for companionship with him in glory—that when one, upon a certain occasion, exclaimed concerning the blessedness of the mother of Jesus, he said, “Yea, rather blessed are they that *hear the word of God and do it.*”

What is meant by the will of God no one need be at a loss to know. There is no simpler idea in the whole range of Scripture. A child may grasp it. The will of God is that which He wishes us to be and to do. The smallest capacity can take this in. In fact, the terms of salvation are altogether such as any ordinary mind can understand. The difficulty is not in knowing : it lies in another direction. The difficulty doubtless lies here, in remembering constantly ALL that God would have us to do and to be, and so remembering as to conform. There are various elements and ingredients in the will of God. There is a great variety of things that He would have us to do and to be. We take them one by one as they present themselves in the reading of the word.

This morning, in our reading of the prophet Isaiah, (chapter 58,) we have one of them brought before us with a special prominence, demanding our most earnest attention. So important is it that Paul declares that without this element of mental furnishing, all our best attainments will go for nothing at the last. The Scripture in question was addressed to Israel after the flesh, but is none the less applicable to us who are commanded to be “mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets” as well as of “the commandments of the apostles” (2 Pet. 3 : 2). It is prefaced by a form of reproof that furnishes an effective background to the matter to be exhibited—a very wholesome, and sobering, and even needed lesson for us. Isaiah is told to cry aloud and not to spare: “show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.” What was it that Isaiah was to bring in charge against them? Was it that they entirely turned away from God, and took no interest in the ordinances of the sanctuary? On the contrary, Yahweh says, “They seek me daily, and delight to know my ways . . . ; they ask of me the ordinances of justice ; they take delight in approaching to God. Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge?” Here is a very religious nation—a nation interested in the temple and the affairs of the Mosaic service—whose complaint is that God does not take notice of them equal to their zeal in serving Him. Why, to such a nation, should Isaiah be directed to lift up his warning voice as a trumpet? What was the matter with them? Wherein lay the defect that alienated God’s regard from all their ceremonial compliances with His will? We presently discover. They were lacking in pitiful hearts and in deeds of mercy. They conformed to the outward requirements of the divine service, but failed in those qualities and motives which were the kernel of the whole law of God. They fasted, but “in the days of your fast, . . . *ye exact all your labours.*” They exacted service from menials, instead of remitting it : their

SEASONS OF COMFORT

servants, their dependants, their inferiors were not allowed to participate in the rest and release of the day, but were kept to their toil and their drudgery. "Ye fast for strife and debate": they left off their usual occupations only to make the fast a day of vainglorious argument, instead of a day of contemplation and humility, and kindly solicitude for neighbours. They duly observed the ceremonial parts of the fast—sitting morosely at stated hours in the garb and attitude of mourners, "appearing unto men to fast," but not fasting in the way acceptable with God. God found no pleasure in their lugubrious penances. "Is it such a fast that I have chosen?" enquires He, "a day for a man to afflict his soul? is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the Lord? Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"

Here we have shown to us plainly enough one aspect of character that God desires to see in his children. It was one of the grounds of his rejection of Israel after the flesh, that they were lacking in the spirit of ready benevolence, finding expression in abundant deeds of kindness. It will be a reason found not lacking in the case of those sent away from the judgment seat, with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. The apostles speak pointedly on the subject. John asks, "Whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John 3 : 17). Jesus often enjoined the same thing, adding that with what measure of kindness we acted towards men, we ourselves would be measured in the day of recompense. It is a matter to be kept most constantly in view. It is a matter we are in danger of forgetting or neglecting. We are most liable to do this through the power of a lost truth which we have been permitted to lay hold of again. We have come to see that the public habit of contributing openly to purposes and institutions of philanthropy is inconsistent with the injunction of Christ to do our almsgiving secretly; and we have come to see that the common notion that men will be saved by good deeds in this direction is an unscriptural and an untrue notion. We have come to see that men can only be saved by the belief and obedience of the gospel, and that no amount of almsgiving will avail for those who are outside the covenant-reconciliation with God in Christ. But we must not allow the recognition of this truth to dim our perception of the other. We must not go to the philanthropist and say, "Ah! you expect to be saved by your annual subscriptions, whereas we look for salvation in the Abrahamic covenant ratified by the blood of Christ only." The philanthropist is undoubtedly mistaken in hoping to make peace with God through his alms-giving; but we shall be mistaken, too, in hoping to find acceptance with Christ through faith alone. Faith without works is

DOING THE WILL OF GOD : COMFORT TO THE FAINT-HEARTED

dead. We must "do the will" of the Father, as well as believe His word. His will is that we be like Him in character. Christ plainly says, "Be like unto your Father." It is a very high standard, but it is the standard, and it would be the height of folly to ignore it. We shall have the standard judicially applied by and by, and it will not help us to shut our eyes. The result will be beautiful when the process is concluded. When a great company of men and women, having the character of God, are separated from the gross elements with which they are necessarily surrounded in the day of their preparation—when they are incorporated together as one society, having immortality of nature as its basis, and the world put into their hands, it will be a day of gladness for them, and a day of blessing for the world.

But you feel depressed and say there is no hope in such a rule of salvation. Slowly, friend, slowly. Why so despondent? Well, you say, it is no use pretending to be perfect. "If I am to be perfect before I can be saved, then I cannot be saved; that is all I have to say." My good friend, let us look the thing fairly in the face and all round; do not go off with a half-impression on the subject. You do not deny that these are the commandments? "No," you say with a groan, "I admit these are the commandments, and I read, 'Blessed are those that do his commandments.' I try to do them honestly and faithfully; but I know I make a sorry business of it; and I say again, if my acceptance is to depend upon my perfect success, then I cannot hope to be accepted." My good friend and brother, you truly read our duty to the commandments, and the blessedness coming out of their observance; God forbid that I should seek to lessen the keenness of your perceptions in this direction. But are you unwilling to open your mind to all the qualifications with which that truth is associated? You say, "I hope not." Very well, have you never heard of forgiveness? You say, "Ah! that is for sinners of the Gentiles." But is there no forgiveness for Christ's brethren? Did not Christ teach his disciples to pray "Forgive us our trespasses"? Has not John the Apostle written, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"? Does not James say, in such a case of confession, "If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him"? Has not David written, "As the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like us a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him"?

"Then I do not understand," says our faint-hearted brother, who refuses to take comfort. "If forgiveness is so easily and so bountifully available, it leaves no force in the declarations that require the doing of the will of God as the condition of our acceptance." Well, it is one of those apparent paradoxes that present no practical difficulty in the right placing of the elements of wisdom. The right answer brings a wholesome lesson, not a little needed in these days when we are in danger of being drawn aside from a divine course of life in two distinct ways. We are in danger, first,

SEASONS OF COMFORT

from the bias inherited with our early theological teaching. This told us, as it tells millions daily from all the so-called evangelical pulpits in the land, that we have nothing to do in order to be saved : that the work of our salvation has been done—done “ long, long ago ”—that we have only to believe ; that we have only to allow Christ to save us ; and that if we think our deeds can in any way contribute to our salvation, we are the victims of a heresy which prevents our salvation more than almost any course of sin. Nothing tends more to sink the mental man in spiritual sloth and stupefaction than this misapplication of a New Testament truth. If it is true that we have not to “ work out our own salvation ” ; that we have not to overcome ; that we shall not receive according to our works ; and if it is not true that the righteous shall scarcely be saved, and that God is not mocked, and that whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap ; if the truth is that we have only to believe that Christ’s excellence and righteousness will stand to our account, and to repudiate all possibility of performing any acceptable service towards God, then the mind will surrender to native indolence and sin. But the truth lies in another direction. Jesus tells us that except our righteousness exceed the Pharisaic measure, we cannot inherit the kingdom of God ; and John, warning us against deception on the point, says, “ Be not deceived : *he that doeth righteousness is righteous.* ” Paul tells us plainly that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom : and Peter, that only if we do the things commanded, will an entrance be abundantly ministered unto us into the everlasting kingdom.

The New Testament truth, which is evangelically misapplied, you understand very well. It is true that as regards its initial stage, salvation is “ not of works ” ; and that if Christ had not abolished death, and laid the foundation of our redemption in his death and resurrection, man’s case was helpless and hopeless. But Christ having laid a foundation for man to build upon, he is no longer helpless and hopeless. He is commanded to rise and work. Christ is now “ the author of eternal salvation *unto all them that OBEY him* ” (Heb. 5 : 9). Those who trust entirely to what Christ has done, as “ evangelical ” gospel preaching tells men to do, will find their trust misplaced at last. Christ having done his part, they must do theirs ; and their wisdom is to find out what that part is, and to do it.

The other danger to which we are exposed lies in a somewhat different direction. There is a danger of resting too much on that very doctrine of forgiveness of which the disconsolate have to be reminded. A man may say, “ I have discarded the evangelical misconception : I recognize that our standing with Christ at the last will be determined by the question of our performance or non-performance of the divine will. ” Yet at the same time, he may live as if he still held on to the mistaken idea of common theology, that we have to “ do nothing, only believe. ” He may live in habitual violation of the divine will, and comfort himself with the persuasion that his habitual disobedience will be covered by that privilege of forgiveness which comes with the priesthood of Christ to all his

accepted brethren. It is possible to make a great mistake here. The privilege of forgiveness is itself conditional. We do not require to go far to see this. The very petition for forgiveness which Christ puts into the mouth of his disciples, in what is called "The Lord's Prayer," is linked with what is in reality a condition, though it sounds like an argument: "Forgive us our trespasses, *as we forgive them that trespass against us.*" Christ places the conditional nature of forgiveness beyond all question in his accompanying comment to this effect: "*If ye forgive not men their trespasses,* NEITHER will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6 : 15).

The conditional nature of forgiveness is manifest on broader grounds. "If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous," so John testifies; but he limits the efficacy of this advocate's functions in saying, "*If we walk in the light,* the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin." Plainly expressed, it comes to this: the Father will forgive those for whom Christ prays, but Christ will only pray for those who are earnestly striving to walk in the light. "I pray not for the world," he said. Of his disciples he said, "I pray for them (the men Thou hast given me out of the world)." We see his patience with them in the Garden of Gethsemane and on other occasions. He made apologies for them, saying, "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak." For Peter, in the hour of direst weakness, he specially exhibited mercy and compassion, saying, beforehand, "I have prayed for thee . . . when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." But let us remember who the disciples were for whom Christ thus prayed. They were not heedless, or indifferent, or disobedient men. Though not enlightened on all points while Christ was yet with them in the flesh, they were in the main earnestly set on the doing of the will of God. This is shown by their response to John's baptism, before Christ chose them. It is placed beyond all doubt by Christ's public recognition of them in this character, on the occasion of his mother and his relatives seeking him. "Who are my mother and my brethren?" said he, and stretching his hands towards his disciples, he said, "BEHOLD MY MOTHER AND MY BRETHREN! *for whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven,* the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."

Consequently, when we think of Christ's readiness to intercede for his disciples, we must remember that his disciples were not men who could truthfully say of themselves what the sinners of this English nation are made to say every Sunday: "We have done those things which we ought not to have done, and we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and there is no health in us." On the contrary, they were men earnestly in love with Christ, and earnestly striving to observe the commandments delivered to them—failing sometimes in their endeavours, doubtless, but earnestly striving to be merciful, and forgiving, and just, and kind—earnestly devoted to the fear of God and the honour of Christ. This must be our case in the main, before we can hope for that forgiveness which will cover our sins and blot out all our failings, shortcomings, and offences. When Paul informs us that Christ is high priest over his own house, he is

SEASONS OF COMFORT

careful to add, "whose house are we, *if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end,*" and he instantly appends this exhortation: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; *lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.* For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end."

We see the position, then, brethren: that Christ's mediation will not be available for those who go on sinning, but only for those who walk in the fear of the Lord all the day long, striving against sin. For such, even if disconsolate, like our not altogether imaginary brother, it will greatly avail in the great day of settlement when the High Priest (then their Judge) may rebuke their faintheartedness, saying, "O ye of little faith, wherefore did ye doubt?" In that day of glorious cleansing, delivered from the encumbrance of this sinful nature, and made to stand pure and white in the glory of incorruptibility and spirit-power, they will joyfully join in the joyful ascription of John the beloved disciple: "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

It practically matters little whether we live to see the dawn of this glorious day or no. There is a natural desire to be among those who shall not taste of death, a desire stimulated to the highest pitch in the presence of the accumulating signs of the nearness of the day of the Lord; but it matters little "whether we wake or sleep." We can but fill the length of our probation in either case. If we die, we lose nothing if our course is pleasing to Christ; if we live to the Lord's coming, we gain nothing if he accept us not. It must be manifest that the whole importance lies in the practical conformity of our daily lives to his will—a conformity relating to many common matters, as men reckon, but which are very important matters when we reflect that on the matter of daily living the judgment will be based which determines our final lot. It is best to think of ourselves as on a level in this respect with the brethren of the apostolic age. They had none of the signs of the Lord's coming before their eyes, yet were they exhorted to be sober and vigilant, and watchful, and earnest to the point of always abounding in the work of the Lord. If we are different from them as to the time in which we live, if we see the tokens all abroad in the earth, of which they knew nothing, pointing to the arrival of the time for the Lord's return, we have only all the greater reason earnestly to addict ourselves to apostolic rules of life, and to remember and obey all the commandments which the Lord has given for the guidance of his house in his absence.

The memory of the commandments is certainly one of the most vital functions of the new man, and whatever helps this helps us on the road of eternal life. God grant the help of His countenance in all our endeavours to prepare for the coming of the Son of Man.

Our Birthright

Our privilege in having been permitted to know the truth is greater than we can continually realise. No man adequately estimates any privilege of which he has been long in possession. He can only get to know its value by contrast or by deprivation. It is not by deprivation that we can have our apprehensions refreshed in this case; for no man can take the truth from us. Truly, we may sell the "right" which God has given us to the tree of Life (Rev. 22:14). We may sell it, as Esau sold his birthright, by bartering it for the temporary conveniences of the present vain life; we cannot otherwise lose it. It is not like some position of worldly advantage, which may be ours today and lost tomorrow. "The word of the Lord endureth for ever," and it is on no less a foundation than the confirmed authentic pledge and undertaking of the Creator of heaven and earth that our confidence of hope is built.

By contrast only can we fully renew our appreciation of the great position to which we have been introduced by the knowledge of the truth delivered from the fogs and darkness of the dreadful ecclesiastical centuries of the past. How do we make this contrast? There are two ways. We can look back to the time when creation was in a haze to our eyes, and life a mysterious thing of fretful impulse and vain desire. If we can feel over again what we felt in those days of moral and intellectual abortion, we shall rejoice with unspeakable thankfulness for an emancipation which has cleared heaven and earth of all darkness, and redeemed life from its fatuity and gloom, and given us an exhilarating policy which changes the "vanity and spirit-veaxation" of natural life into the light, beauty, and gladness of the perennial wisdom of God.

But it is not easy at all times to perform this feat of subjective comparison. We get at the result easier by looking out into the darkness that is in the world. We are coming into contact with this everyday in some shape or form. I heard the other day a conversation in the saloon of an Atlantic steamer which gave me a glimpse of the sort I am referring to. The speakers were two gray-headed gentlemen of considerable apparent culture and experience. They were speaking of the wonderful advances that the world was making in all matters of travel and the supply of instant information from the remotest points of the earth. They said it seemed to them as if the time must come when all interest in life would be taken away by no effort being necessary to get or learn. The more thoughtful of them said that it was a fund of knowledge which would always be a source of inexhaustible interest if men could only know how to get at it. He was convinced that there was in religion a perfect satisfaction for the human mind, but the misfortune was that it received such a low place in the studies of men that it was scarcely possible for anyone to reach the right attainment. Knowledge was so superficial and in difference so great that men were starving and seemed as if they must starve in the most

SEASONS OF COMFORT

important matter. Something occurred to break the conversation, and it was not pursued, but the little snatch I heard was sufficient to fill me with a yearning sense, both of personal gratitude and of commiseration for the unhappy state of man.

Here we are with the key to the problem of existence in our hands. How great that problem is has appeared to many a capable but groping intellect. It is the problem which David summarises when he asks, "O Lord, wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?" It seems as we look upon the endless procession of human generation upon the earth as if it were all in vain. Men are born, grow, hope, strive, are disappointed, get weary of the struggle and die, and their children come after them with the same hopes and the same endeavour and the same end. Yet behind all, there is a kind of radiance of promise as of far distant sunlight on the horizon. The mind cannot but see boundless power and wisdom in the universe, and cannot but argue, however dimly, that there must be possibilities of life as much above present experience as heaven is high above the earth. Yet the argument does not avail much, in the absence of knowledge. Thinkers and poets languish in their measurements and assessments of the magnitude, beauties, and problems with which the universe overwhelms the understanding. Things are great; things are wise; things are beautiful; yet things are dreadful. And in all the contemplations of the greatness and the wisdom of the beauty — whether in the castitudes of the starry expanse, or the invisible and minute world which the microscope reveals, — there comes forth no answer to the question, What is man! No solution to the problem, What is he living for? No alleviation of the apparently pitiless and calamitous vanity in which his lot in all countries is involved. If the mind have no higher information than nature can yield, it sinks back at last into a species of stoical despair, in which all the finer capabilities of the human mind are blighted.

Oh, men, on land and sea; ye are wandering far from the fountain of living waters. Ye have eyes on one another only. Ye seek good in your merely animal wants or intellectual gratifications. You cannot get satisfaction there. All these things have a place in the economy of things. We must eat and sleep, and clothe and associate and consider and serve one another, but there is a topmost range, towering high above all these, where alone peace is to be found, and which when found, makes all the others holy and satisfying. Consider your own constitution and it will tell you. Look at the configuration of the human brain and it will advise you. Are there not in it a clustering condensation of powers and capacities of which the highest, highest in mechanical position, highest in mental scope — the very crown of our being — is the reaching upwards and opening outwards to the SUPREME? What if this is scarcely to be met with in a full or enlightened form? What if the vast mass of the population shew it only in a degraded and futile way? What if its indication in most cases is so obscure and uncertain that it can scarcely be read? Is it not bringing the desirable point to the leadstar of existence, even though universal cloud on earth for a time conceal its shining? The north pole was a fact

when the trembling needle of the compass had not as yet been poised on the disc that should enable mariners to navigate the ocean. The sublimities of music were latent and possible when as yet the only sounds to be heard were the clattering of bones, the beatings of gongs, or the harsh blast of the horn. The splendid movements of the universe had been for ages shewing the presence of a Master Mind when as yet our untutored forefathers scarcely noticed the twinkling glory of the heavens at night. So though "the natural mind is enmity against God" — though "the world hath not known the Eternal Father" the Eternal Father is **THERE**, and it is eternal life to know Him and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent, though there were not upon earth a single Noah, Daniel, or Job, to apprehend and rejoice and faithfully championize the glorious fact.

Nothing is more melancholy in assemblies of educated Gentiles than to see this most glorious of topics ignored. What does it mean? They profess to be religious; and their profession means that religion is the transcendantly highest concern of life, and yet everything is honoured and provided for but this. Consequently, in association they are a mere collection of icicles, who if they do stick together occasionally, do so by freezing, that is, by the action of identical selfish interest and not by the affinity arising from a common submission to the will of God. Their abject timidity in divine directions is a shame to them. Benighted Mahometans put them to the blush by their hearty and courageous devotion at all times and places. But, alas, there is a sadder interpretation. It is not that they are ashamed of God; it is that they are unbelieving. They have most of them reached the pitiful death of believing in their hearts with David's fool that there is no God. Oh, where are men's eyes? Have they none? Can they look at nature's exquisite workmanship in things great and small; can they contemplate the mysterious all-prevalent energy that lies at the root of every form of substance animate and inanimate — can they think of the history of man upon the earth — the nature of the Bible — the character of Christ — the fulfilment of the prophecy, and not perceive the traces of eternal power and wisdom? It seems they can. Sad day of darkness! How great the privilege — how great the responsibility of being called to the position of children of light.

How great is that light — how noble and true. It is not an empirical — it is not an imagined — it is not a questionable thing. It is not like the inebriation of the so-called religious world — and enthusiasm wrought up into the froth of idealess excitement, and expending itself in egoistic ignobleness. It is not like the un-identifiable and unproveable illumination of the theological sects — resting upon an experience which is purely subjective and necessarily limited to individual feeling — which they assume to be the action of the Holy Spirit, but which may be the action of something else, and which a comparison with the authentic deliverances of the Holy Spirit, in the Scriptures, shows to be something else. It is a definable, a palpable, a proveable thing. It rests upon the basis of accomplished facts. The most general and comprehensive of these facts is the one stated by

Paul, that "God has spoken!" This speaking was not in any occult or obscure manner, requiring the refinements of human wisdom for its recognition and understanding. It was "at sundry times and divers manners," as Paul observes .. Of these we are enabled to judge because of our actual relation to one of them. 'One' of the 'manners' was by writing. God commanded the men to whom He spoke to write what He said (Num. 33:2). He qualified them to do in a way that placed the writing beyond the infirmities of human will (2 Pet. 1:21; 2 Tim. 3:16) the writing so produced we have. It has come down to us in a manner that excludes doubt as to whether the Bible is it. No man could have substituted a false Koran for the writing of Mahomet among the millions of Mahomedans who from the beginning have received and revered it. So no man could have substituted other than the real writings of Moses and the prophets among the many generations of Jews who have handed them down to our own day in an unbroken line of transmission; or other than the real writings of the apostles among the communities founded by their labours in the first century, and historically continued, though in a corrupted form, from that day to this. We look into the Bible and we find it corresponds with this account of its origin. It is as different from human writing as the eternal is from the temporary. It is its own witness. It is impossible for a capable and a humble mind to read it without feeling this.

Then, as we read, we find it contains the very guidance which distracted human life requires. It tells why we are here, and how circumstances came into their present unhappy form. It tells us that God made the earth for man and man for God, but that early after the appearance of man upon the earth, man set God aside, and sought to live for man himself alone, in consequence of which God hid His face from man, gave him over to the dominion of death, and scattered him all abroad on the earth to look after himself for a while till the situation should be ripe for God to realise His purpose in placing man upon the earth. It shows us that as a step in the direction of the accomplishment of this purpose, God called Abraham, and established His covenant with him, and chose His descendants and formed them into a nation, manifesting Himself to them in their deliverance from Egypt, and in the promulgation to them of a law by Moses which the Jews hold in the hand unaltered to this day, after a lapse of 3,000 years, and which on study is found to be the paragon of political constitutions. It shows us the history in the main of disobedience and punishment. Interwoven with this history, as its most material feature, it presents the records of the messages of reproof, instruction and promise sent to them direct from God by the prophets; and last of all, the narrative of the sending of His Son, and what he did, and how his life ended, and what ends were associated with his whole work. These messages and that narrative contains what is to be found in no other document under the sun, the foretelling of God's final purpose with the earth and man, and the full revelation of what God desires at the hand of men now in this present time.

The reading of such a book is found experimentally to lead to those results which the Apostle Paul said it was given for. He says it was 'able to make men wise unto salvation,' and was "profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:15). How profitable it is we can all testify who have taken any pains to make ourselves acquainted with it, first in the elementary knowledge of its contents, at the beginning, and then in that daily intimacy which

it calls for. It must be so. Men are governed, and the mind is moulded by ideas. Here we have ideas the most potent under the sun. What idea is so ennobling as the revelation that the Being in which all things subsist is an Eternal Person, embracing the universe in the effluence of His uncreated Spirit, and working all things after the counsel of His own will? What so calming and purifying as the fact that no distance can separate us from Him, but that in the subtle energy of His presence, "all things are naked and open, and no creature is hid from His sight?" What philosophy of man's evil state at once so rational and satisfactory as the dogmatic teaching of the Divine Spirit that death reigns because of sin, and that the affliction of man is due to the turning away of the countenance of the Almighty because of human insubordination? What solatium in the midst of the evil, so great as the assurance that God himself will apply a remedy, wipe tears from every eye and fill the earth with his glory? What tranquility of mind, in the presence of the distracted problems of human state and history that press themselves on every thoughtful mind that looks beyond the horizon of his immediate experience, can come from any source, like that which is imparted by the conviction that God has a plan which is being slowly worked out in the course of the ages, and which will culminate in the re-appearance of Christ upon the earth to take the government with power, and bring all things into subjection to God? What comfort of anticipation, what interest in life, what incentive to conformity with the ways of righteousness can compare with that which springs from the assurance that Christ will judge the living and the dead, and confer glory, honour, and immortality on all who please him by their faith and obedience? What prospect so attractive as that which the Word of God opens out to us, of God becoming known and loved and praised in all the earth, with the fervour of David, and every heart filled with gladness, every life ennobled with heavenly gift? What satisfaction so perfect as that which springs from the fact of forgiveness and reconciliation to God through Christ, and the certain hope of ascending from the weak and grovelling and decaying nature we can now possess to a nature pure, incorruptible, capable, joyous and everlasting?

All these are the teachings of the Spirit of God in the Holy Scriptures. Their infinite superiority to all ideas of man is manifest on even a superficial comparison of their effects with those produced by the philosophy which is bounded by the horizon of human life as it now is. There is something sterile and unsatisfying in the highest of merely human thoughts and attainments. It is not in the nature of life as it now is, to satisfy the mind. The mind is so constituted that nothing short of the infinite can satisfy. In all merely human projects, it matters not in what direction, riches, power, fame, art, science — there is an end, which when once reached, becomes the grave of enterprise and the seed bed of discontent. There is nothing satisfying in what man proposes for himself. He cannot find peace in that boundless mental action which lays hold of God for its delight and stay; Christ as the ideal of its affection, and an endless futurity of perfection as the vista of its anticipations.

SEASONS OF COMFORT

This, dear brethren and sisters, is what the understanding of the truth has brought us. It has conferred upon us entire liberty.

What remains for us but to stand fast in it? It is a position we may lose if we neglect the conditions of its preservation. We must beware of the enticements suggested to us in the spectacle of cultured men and women "without God and without hope in the world." They are interesting in the present desolation, but it is a mere picture — a mere appearance-hollow if we penetrate it — absolutely ephemeral if we follow it to its close. We must beware of the zests and honours and emulations connected with society as it now is. It is a society that is not the friend of God, however amiable and attractive. We must now surrender to its seductions, or accept its embraces. It is written, "The friendship of the world is enmity" that is liable to overtake the patient continuance in godliness. It is not in vain that we addict ourselves to the ways and the studies of godliness, and decline the leeks and garlic of the Egyptians. The issue of things will justify the choice of wisdom, and reward beyond what tongue can utter or heart conceive, the faithful endurance of the monotony and self-denials of this time of probation. "Yet a little while, and he that shall come will come," from whose bright presence will fly all clouds and darkness for ever.

(From an Address at a Fraternal Gathering 1878)

"Society around them was at that moment one vast carnival of the flesh. 'A Merry Christmas' was the watchword; a sort of hilarity without an idea, a glow of the animal spirits ... there was a general suspension of the little good sense and sobriety at any time to be found in the community. As brethren of Christ they could have no sympathy with this view of the season. A merry Christmas had no meaning for them except a repugnant one. It was a Pagan festival from which, as sons of God, they stood aloof feeling truly thankful only for the opportunity it afforded them for an interchange of friendship on the basis of those things of unspeakable excellence which stood related to the position to which they had been called ... not ... a time when saints might play a fool."