

Tried by Fire-1Peter by F B Meyer

TRIED BY FIRE EXPOSITIONS OF THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PETER BY F. B. MEYER, B. A.

- PART 1 - 1 Peter 1:1-2:10
- PART 2 - 1 Peter 2:11-4:2
- PART 3 - 1 Peter 4:3-5:10

PREFACE

THESE Expositions do not attempt to be critical or exhaustive; but the aim has been to deduce such spiritual exhortations and consolations from the glowing words of the Apostle as will most readily help Christian people in the varied circumstances of daily life.

Delivered first as Expositions in the course of my stated ministry, they were afterwards published week by week in the pages of "The Christian"; and in response to very many requests are here preserved in a permanent form.

It has never been my plan in regular exposition to burden the minds of my hearers with all the different opinions of commentators on the varied points arising for discussion in almost every paragraph. It has been my habit rather to read everything within my reach, and then to state my own general conclusions as simply and clearly as possible. This method has been followed in the present case.

Leighton's admirable Commentary has been of considerable use, and I have enriched my chapters with several extracts from this mine of spiritual wealth. Indeed, wherever quotation marks occur without reference to the name of the author, the reader may conclude that they indicate passages culled from this source. I trust that I have acknowledged all my indebtednesses where the ipsissima verba have been used: but who of us can trace the source of ten thousand thoughts which by use we have come to appropriate as our own!

Written amid the multiplied engagements of a busy life, it would be impossible to estimate the benefit to heart and thought by bending over these translucent depths of sacred truth--so calm, so still, so profound, so counteractive of life's feverish haste; and it is my earnest hope that these Expositions may pass on to others some of the blessedness which their preparation has brought to myself. F. B. MEYER.

I. THE PRELUDE

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia; elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied."--1Peter 1:1, 2.

This Epistle was the child of many tears and of much sorrow. It was written probably about the year A.D. 65, when the followers of Jesus of Nazareth were regarded with growing dislike, whilst clouds of suffering and persecution were passing over the house of God (1Peter 4:17). The disciples had already begun to learn by bitter experience that they were to follow their Master's steps by way of the Via Dolorosa to the light of the Resurrection morn; and that they must not expect softer names or usage than had been accorded to Him. They needed comfort; a stimulus to patience; a recital of the arguments for heroic endurance--all of which the Spirit of God supplied through these fervid and persuasive paragraphs.

And thus there is hardly any portion in the Word of God which has been more eagerly read than this Epistle, by those who were pressed with many trials and weaknesses. By exiles in distant lands, shut out from all human tenderesses; by travellers and voyagers; by persecuted and suffering saints, hunted into the dens and caves of the earth, or immured in the living rock and beneath the boom of the ocean wave; by those whom sore sickness or venerable age may have incapacitated from meeting with the visible church--these words have been lovingly pondered and treasured, as a priceless heritage.

To a student of the earlier life of the Apostle Peter it would have seemed in the highest degree unlikely that one so impulsive, so

rough-handed, so fond of action, should have been selected to write some of the tenderest and most consolatory words that have ever fallen on the ears of suffering and persecuted saints. Yet so it befell. And we are left to infer how keenly this strong nature must have suffered before it could have become so sweetened and softened, so humble and tender, as to afford a tropic soil for the luxuriant growth of the balsam and spicery of Divine comfort. Very different was this Apostle of Jesus Christ, when he wrote this Epistle, from the fisherman who girded himself in early life to his toils--from the disciple who abandoned all to follow the Master with enthusiastic ardour. Frost and fire had disintegrated the rock. Age had diminished the writer's strength, taken the sparkle from his eye, sown his head with grey, and bowed his frame. His self-reliance had learnt to cling to a stronger than himself; his wisdom to defer to a wiser. The asperities and ruggedness of his character had been toned and mellowed by suffering and sorrow, as the tints of a picture are softened by the breath of the years. In the deepest sense he was "converted" at last, that he might set himself to strengthen his brethren (Luke 22:32).

We cannot now recover his hidden history, lost in the gulf which separates this Epistle from the moment when last we caught sight of him emerging from the prison at Jerusalem (Acts 12:19), or exciting the indignation of St. Paul at Antioch (Gal. 2:11). We have no certain record of how those years were spent. Though, since he speaks so familiarly to these saints scattered throughout Asia Minor, many of whom may have received their first impressions from his lips on the day of Pentecost (comp. first verse with Acts 2:9), we should judge that he travelled with his wife (1 Cor. 9:5) for some time throughout those regions, settling for a longer time in the new city, which was rising on the ancient site of Babylon (1Peter 5:13). This Epistle was written there; and the countries mentioned are enumerated in the order which would naturally have suggested itself to one looking out on them from a commanding central position.

1. THE INSCRIPTION

To the "Strangers of the Dispersion." These words clearly designate Jews as principally addressed. While as yet the site which was to be occupied by Rome was covered by but a few straggling huts within a rude enclosure, the King of Assyria was already engaged in carrying into exile the ten tribes of Israel (2 Kings 17:6, &c.). They were captives quite a century and a half before Judah and Benjamin were transplanted to Babylon; and it does not appear that they, to any great extent, participated in the restoration decreed by Cyrus. They remained in the land of their adoption, whence many travelled in various directions until, at the time of the writing of the New Testament, they were found in all the principal cities of the world. These were the "Strangers of the Dispersion." Their speech, their garb, their physiognomy, their religious rites--marked them out as perfectly different from those around them, and identified them with the holy city and with that peculiar people whose name they bore.

Many of them had become Christians, not only through the influences experienced when visiting their national metropolis, the very atmosphere of which must have been impregnated with Christian thought; but also through the labours of the Apostle Paul, whose first efforts were always directed to his own people, and whose name must be for ever associated with the infant churches which he founded in the regions where so many of the Jews of the dispersion had settled.

But we must not limit the scope of these words to Christian Jews. There are phrases which demand a wider interpretation. That, for instance, which alludes to "former lusts" of those addressed (1Peter 1:14); and that also which speaks of them as not having been "a people" in time past (1Peter 2:10). Besides which, the term strangers is distinctly employed in a spiritual sense (1 Pet. 2:11), and so applies equally to all who go out to Christ without the camp, bearing his reproach, and who confess that they have here no continuing city, but seek one to come.

Do we cultivate enough the spirit of the stranger? We know what it is to turn from the attractions of a foreign city, with its wealth of art, its churches and its picture galleries, its antique buildings, and the glitter of its modern boulevards, towards a tiny box of brick in a grimy street, which is endeared to us as home. We may not linger longer; we are going home. Or if we stay on from day to day, we hardly unpack our portmanteaus, and certainly do not secure a settled abode, because it is not our home. Nor are we too much troubled by the discomforts and annoyances of our hotel, or by the risings of popular excitement around. Of what consequence are such things to those who may indeed bestow a passing interest on events transpiring around them, but whose interests are elsewhere, in the place which, however humble, differs from all the world beside in being home?

Oh for more of the TENT LIFE amongst God's people!

But it is only possible, when they catch sight, and keep sight, of "the city which hath foundations." When that city is a city of tradition or dream, men will begin to dig the foundations of permanent homes and ample fortunes. But when it is realized as the object of passionate persuasion, descried by faith rising above the mists and plains of time, and embraced by outstretched eager arms, they dwell in tents, and confess themselves strangers and pilgrims.

It is said that when, in a strange land, the Swiss soldier hears the rude melody which gathers the cows back from the pastures, he is so filled with longings for home that he will cast down his sword, tear off his foreign livery, renounce his claims for wage, in order to hurry back to his mountain home. Would that such an effect might be experienced, after a spiritual sort, by many readers of these lines; who, as we speak of the inheritance, shall also array their spirits in the pilgrim garb, and start, not as they did in the Middle

Ages for the holy sepulchre, or in quest of the holy grail, but for the New Jerusalem, on which the hand of invasion has never fallen, nor sin left its blight!

2. THE SPIRITUAL DESIGNATION

Scattered in the countries, and yet gathered in God's election, chosen or picked out; strangers to men amongst whom they dwelt, but known and foreknown to God; removed from their own country, to which men have naturally an unalterable affection, but made heirs of a better.

Elect.--Before all worlds God chose us in Christ (Eph. 1:4). There is no election outside of Christ. He was chosen, and all who were one with Him, in a union which was before time, but which is manifested in the process of time. We know little or nothing of the secret transactions of Eternity; but we can tell if we were included in them by a very simple test. All whom the Father gave to Christ come unto Him (John 6:37). If, therefore, we have come to Christ, attracted to Him, as steel filings to the magnet, we may assure our hearts, and dare to lay claim to the blessings and responsibilities included within that mystic circle.

But notice to what we are elect!--We are elect to OBEDIENCE Not merely that we should escape the penalty due to sin, or that we should pass into a region where storms do not rave and sin does not molest. No, this is but a small thing in the history of our souls. We are elect to obey; elect to suffer, that through suffering we may become strong; elect to be the saviours, and helpers, and priests, of other men, through a very baptism of blood and tears; elect to be nearest Christ, because resembling Him most closely in ministry, and devotion, and love.

Election is no selfish thing.--Those who think it is, and who lay flattering unction to their hearts that they at least are right, and may therefore leave the world to its fate, are probably utterly deceived; or have only beheld the faintest glimmer of what God means by his high calling and choice. We are chosen to obey; to serve; to learn; to suffer; to die daily that others may be blessed and saved. Elect stars shine--to illumine the night. Elect nations--to lead the van of the world's progress. Elect spirits, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Paul, Luther, and Knox--to be the channels down which, at much cost to them, the grace of God may better reach the world beneath their feet.

According to the foreknowledge of God the Father.--From all eternity He knew those who would accept the overtures of mercy. Shall we say that He foresaw the certain affinity between the elect One and those who would cleave to Him by faith? And concerning all these, whom He foreknew, He also predestinated, determined, resolved, that they should be conformed to the image of his Son. To those who are really saved by faith in the Lord Jesus, there is an infinite source of comfort here, in knowing that--beneath all the changes of our moral and spiritual condition--outlasting time, strong as Omnipotence, tender and true as the heart of God, there is a Divine purpose which is pledged to carry us onwards to beauty of moral character, and an obedience which is fashioned after the pattern of Christ's (Rom. 8:29).

Through sanctification of the Spirit.--The election of the Father in eternity is made effectual through the work of the Holy Spirit in time. That which is election in the Father, appears as sanctification in the work of the Spirit. Sanctification is setting apart. The root idea of the word is just separation from common uses to the service of God. The saint is one who has separated himself from known evil in an act of consecration, which is prolonged through all his after-life; and who is animated by but one aim and purpose--to be only for Jesus. We cannot do more than this; nay, we cannot do this without the Holy Spirit. From Him comes the first conviction that we are wrong; and the indication of the infirmity, or weight, or evil, from which we must get free. From Him also comes the grace by which we are set free. From Him comes the in-filling with the love and life of God, which is inseparably connected with each act of consecration. And thus there is evolved at last the obedience which pleases God; and which is thus wrought through--and in--sanctification of the Spirit.

Yield to the Spirit. Recognize his indwelling. Do what He commands, and forbear from doing aught that his still small voice forbids. Every such act of consecration to his will must lead to the fuller light, and love, and power which make up holiness. And out of all this there will unfold the fair life of obedience, which is the perfected blossom of the hidden subsoil root of election. Election, the root; the grace of the Spirit, the atmosphere; obedience, the flower.

Unto sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.--Here, then, is the Trinity--Father, Son, and Spirit--all engaged in the work of lifting us from the bondage of corruption into a life wherein we shall as much love to do right as now to do wrong.

Very fitly does this mention of the blood follow that of obedience, as if to remind us that the best obedience could not avail to save us apart from the precious blood, and that our best acts need sprinkling. "The very tears of the purest repentance, unless they be sprinkled with this blood, are impure. All our washings without this are but washings of the blackamoor--labour in vain" (Jer. 2:22; Job 9:30, 31).

How necessary that the prayer of the contrite Psalmist should not be far from our lips on our holiest days and after our best services! "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow" (Psa. 51.).

3. THE SALUTATION

"Grace and peace be multiplied."

The Apostle here blends the Western and Eastern modes of salutation. The Greek used grace, the Hebrew peace; and whatever each meant was intended to be conveyed in this salutation.

Grace is the unmerited love of God, stooping to save and bless; the source of all those bright and holy gifts which come from his infinite heart. As one beam of light will break into many colours, so does the grace of God decompose into the several priceless gifts of his grace; "grace upon grace," like ripples breaking in music on a silver strand.

Peace follows upon grace. There is first peace with God, and then the peace of God. We lay down our arms of rebellion, and are welcomed into the family, so that there is no longer discord or dispute. And then the very peace which dwelt in the heart of Jesus begins to float like a sweet odour through our inmost being; and it garrisons our heart and mind.

Such is the heritage of the servants of the Lord. And there is no higher wish to be entertained for them, than that this grace and peace should be in them, and increase in geometrical progression, and so be multiplied.

II. THE INHERITANCE

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." 1Peter 1:3-4

HOW little does the wailing infant, over whose cradle glistens the coronet first won by the stout arm of a soldier-ancestor, understand of the inheritance to which he has been born! The ancestral home, the far-spread lands, the noble rank, the prestige of an ancient and lofty lineage--all these things are his; but years must pass ere they can be truly realized or appreciated. And how much less do the most saintly and heaven-taught spirits conceive of that inheritance which is ours so soon as we become the children of God through faith in Jesus Christ! (These opening sentences were suggested by one of Dr. Guthrie's sermons on The Inheritance of the Saints.) See how this fervent Apostle, though he would fain find words to tell us in what its bliss consists, is obliged to content himself with negatives. It is so much easier to say what the inheritance is not, than to set down the elements of its exceeding weight of glory. It were easier far to enumerate all the ills of this mortal life, and to say of each, This is not there, than to give an inventory of all that awaits the saints, as one by one they pass through the veil, and find themselves in the land of their choice.

But surely, in dealing with the ungodly, it were well not only to dwell on the woes they must incur, but to insist on the glories they must miss unless they bethink themselves and repent. Ah! if only we could speak in terms glowing enough, tinged with the certainty and rapture of our own glad hopes concerning the fair land to which we are going, we should induce many a dweller in the City of Destruction to start with us on pilgrimage. But how can we talk with vivid conviction of that which occupies so small a space in our own inner life?

1. THE NATURE OF OUR INHERITANCE

Many and varied descriptions might be given of it: Salvation, in its fulness and perfectness, which is ours in germ, but which waits for its hidden glories of colour and form to be revealed in the summer that is coming (1Peter 1:5, 6, 7, 8, 9; Mark 13:28).

The City of God, the vision of which, as its walls and pinnacles rose above the mists of time, allured the patriarchs forward, and made them content to dwell in frail and shifting tents. Heaven, with its cloudless light and sweet societies. Glory, as we shall see it on the face of our Emmanuel, and as it shall flood our own happy spirits.

But there is a deeper and more comprehensive view than any of these: one which includes them all; as the ocean includes seas, and bays, and straits, which, though known by separate names, are parts of its majestic and all-embracing fulness. In the law of the Jewish priesthood, "the Lord spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them. I am thy part, and thine inheritance, among the children of Israel" (Num. 18:20). It was a very satisfactory arrangement for the pious priest. He could well dispense with the olive yards and vineyards, the cornfields and homesteads of Palestine, if he might have God to be the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever. And the Psalmist eagerly caught at the thought, gladly surrendering all portion in this life, if only he might be "satisfied" with God (Psa. 17:15). "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: Thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage" (Psa. 16:5-6).

Our inheritance is God Himself.--Not the golden harps. Not the sea of glass mingled with fire. Not rest from pain and immunity

from sorrow. Not the blessed society of heaven. From all these, apart from God, we should at last turn away dissatisfied. They are but the accessories and embodiments of something deeper, more inward and rapturous--the possession of God. Heirs of God, i.e., of all the communicable glories of the Divine nature. The Psalmist expressed the literal truth when he said, "Whom have I in heaven but Thee?" (Ps 73:25.) To know Him, to explore his being, to live on his fulness, to discover new tracts and continents in the terra incognita of Godhead, to see his glory, to be changed into his image--this is "the heritage of the servants of the Lord."

Our inheritance begins here.--As a matter of right all God's nature is ours directly we are born into his family; as a vast tract of country, filled with woods and rivers and ore, belongs to the heir at the moment of birth. But, as a matter of fact, we shall never occupy all, even when eternity is passing over us; the finite can never fully grasp the infinite. Yet, from the first moment of conversion, we may begin to enter on our inheritance. We commence by studying the inspired chart, which maps out that inheritance, and tells us what God is, and what He is prepared to be to us. Next we proceed to appropriate and make use of his attributes and properties for daily need. Then we become possessed of the indwelling Spirit of God, who brings his very nature into ours. And so we come to possess God just in proportion as He possesses us. We inherit Him as our portion up to the measure in which He inherits us. "The Lord is my portion, saith my soul." "The Lord's portion is his people."

Up! Friends; you are living on a vast estate. Around you on all hands are God's love, and grace, and power, and wisdom, awaiting your use. Set yourselves to know, and then to appropriate and enjoy. "There is much land yet to be possessed." Do not be content to be circumscribed and limited, as were the Danes by our great Alfred. Be rather like the early squatters in the Western States, who roll back their fences, taking in evermore of the rich virgin soil, so adding field to field.

But our inheritance can only be perfected hereafter.--It is "reserved in heaven." We tire and faint amid our most rapturous experiences. The body refuses to sustain the weight of glory. The machinery of mortality breaks down beneath the pressure of the loftiest spiritual emotion. "I fell at his feet as dead." "Thou canst not see my face; for no man can see my face and live." And it may be that just as there are qualities in the universe which we cannot perceive because we have only five senses, so there are properties in God which we know not of because our powers of perception are limited. It is therefore quite conceivable that when clothed upon with our house which is from heaven, which will have a great many more windows in it than the earthly house of this tabernacle which is built for stormy weather, there will be sides and aspects of the Divine nature that we know nothing about to-day, but which shall be communicable and communicated to us. (Suggested by Dr. Maclaren) Ah, fair inheritance! If earth and heaven, which are but as his vesture, are so lovely, what will He be!

2. THE QUALITIES OF THIS INHERITANCE

Incorruptible i.e., as to its substance. It is not liable to decay. Nature looks her best in the days of early autumn. The golden corn-sheaves; the gorgeous tints of the fading leaves; the berries of the wild rose and the rowan; the undiminished foliage of the forest trees; the ruddy wealth of the orchard: but, amid all, our enjoyment is tinged with sadness, for we know that decay lies beneath, eagerly at work; and that ere long the woodland glade will be strewn with the dying leaves, falling in myriads before the gale, and rotting in drenched heaps. So, too, amid our happiest converse with beloved ones, a sad foreboding sometimes invades our hearts, suggesting that it will not last: the artless child must leave the mother's embrace; the brother will choose another confidante than the sister whom he dearly loved. But the knowledge of God, like our treasure in heaven, cannot corrupt, nor can it be stolen from us by any thieving hand. It cannot pass from us; nor we from it. It cannot share the fate of any earthly possession. Nay, when we are stripped of all things else, and sit like another Job amid the wreck of former wealth, then we begin as never before to take measure of our eternal treasure; and there arises before us such a conception of the magnificence of our inheritance in God that we cry, "Give what Thou wilt! without Thee I am poor; and with Thee rich; take what Thou wilt away!"

Undeiled, i.e., as to its purity.--"All possessions here are defiled and stained with many defects and failings." No marble without its flaw. No flower without its freckle. No fruit without its blight. No face without its blemish. No Joy without its taint. No day without its regret. No heart, except one, without sin. The leprosy of human sin has so spread itself throughout the whole creation that, as in Israel of old, garments and houses are alike infected (Lev. 13, 14.). And even in the purest earthly friendships, a love which in its inception is innocent and natural too often becomes tainted with jealousy and selfishness, if not with pollution.

But to know God is to come into contact with the source of Purity itself. "He that is near Me is near to-the fire" is a saying which an ancient writer puts into the mouth of Christ. A wisp of straw might sooner survive the flame than defilement outlive contact with God. "Neither shall evil dwell with thee." So, far from our heritage becoming defiled, we cannot enjoy it unless we love Purity. The pure in heart alone see God: and the more they see of Him, the more pure they become.

Unfading, i.e., as to its beauty.--Here grows the amaranth, the flower that fades not. One never tires of what is really beautiful. There is always some fresh expression on a beautiful face, some new witchery of colour on a beautiful landscape. We can easily understand how a great preacher of this century, after some masterly effort, would quiet his mind by taking from his pocket a handful of precious stones which he always carried there; handling them, rolling them to and fro, holding them up to the light, and never tiring of their ever-changing beauty.

There is all this in fellowship with God. To know Him is a fountain of ever fresh delight. He never palls on the satiated appetite. We never feel that there is monotony, sameness, weariness, in his love. "All the happiness of this life," said William Law, "is but trying to quench thirst out of golden empty cups." But who shall speak thus of the river of God's pleasure, which, as it gratifies the thirst, increases it; which is ever more and better than we could conceive; and which allures us on to deeper and yet deeper draughts, to desires which grow in being satisfied?

3. OUR TITLE TO THIS INHERITANCE

"Begotten again." It is not ours by merit; or by conquest; or by natural birth. We may be the children of parents who have passed into the skies; and yet we may miss the inheritance of the saints in light. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"; so said One who could not err. "If children, then heirs," is the indispensable order. Nor is it difficult to see why it must be so. The inheritance is spiritual; and it requires spiritual faculties to apprehend and enjoy it. But in such as have not been born again those spiritual faculties are wanting. A blind man may stand amid the fairest landscape unconcerned, because the one organ by which he could enjoy it is wanting. A lunatic may live in a house stored with treasures of art and literature unaffected, because his mind is blank to all its attractions. And the unregenerate man might stand in heaven itself, and miss God, for want of those powers of spiritual perception of which he is deficient. Sin blinds the eye, stops the ear, and hardens the heart. The prime necessity is life; and life can only begin in the new birth. We cannot possess God unless we love Him. We cannot love Him, unless there is a kinship and reciprocity of nature. But this nature is not ours by the first birth; and if it is to be ours at all, it can only be by the impartation of a new nature and life, which are the gift of God, through his Word (1Peter 1:23). Hast thou been born again? The certain sign is the faith which receives Christ. "As many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name; which were born of God" (John 1:12-13, R.V.).

4. THE LINK BETWEEN OUR PRESENT AND FUTURE

"A living hope." We already have something of our inheritance, but at the best it is only the earnest--what the half-crown of the labourer in the feeing market is to the year's wage, or the sod of the estate to the broad acres. "Now through a glass darkly"--glimpses soon shadowed; outlines not filled up; dark sayings we cannot interpret.

But the time is coming when we shall know even as we are known, and see face to face; when our communion with God shall be as unfettered as our service; when we shall love Him better, and possess Him more fully. Towards this blessed consummation, as yet reserved, our hope stretches out both her hands; meanwhile, it is an inspiration and stimulus for every moment of our life. It is, indeed, "a living hope."

Hope is said sometimes to die: this never can. Sometimes, though it lingers in the breast, it is inoperative: this is always quick and powerful. "Worldly hopes often mock men; they are not living, but lying and dying ones. We live to bury them. But this hope answers our expectations to the full, and deceives in no way, but far exceeds them."

Its basis is "the resurrection of Jesus Christ front the dead."-The man who was once so hard to convince as he ran to the empty tomb, now realizes the full meaning of that marvellous fact. Our Brother, Representative, and Lord, not only identified Himself with us in life and death, but has made us one with Himself in the Resurrection, which is also God's seal and Amen to all He said and did; and is, therefore, a Divine corroboration not only of his words, but of all the structure of hope and expectancy which we have built on them.

5. THE ASCRIPTION OF PRAISE

With which this paragraph begins is most befitting:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

Who shall compute the full measure of his abundant mercy? Mercy that He gave his Son to die and to rise again! Mercy that He has adopted us to a position which angels might envy; because we are children, and therefore heirs! Mercy that He is willing to be the inheritance of such as we are! Mercy that He has given us such strong consolation, and an anchor so sure and steadfast! What multitudinous, infinite, inexpressible mercy! Let us bless Him for it, the Father of Jesus, and our Father in Him. I Praise Him! praise Him!

"It is a cold, lifeless thing to speak of spiritual things on mere report; but they that speak of them as their own, and as having some experience of their sweetness, cannot mention them, but their hearts are straight taken with such gladness as they are forced to vent in praises. This is such an inheritance that the very hopes and thoughts of it are able to sweeten the greatest griefs. What, then, shall the full fruition of it be!"

III. KEPT

"Kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." -1Peter 1:5.

To have been told as in the preceding verse, that our inheritance was reserved in heaven could have yielded us little comfort unless that assurance had been followed and capped by this, that the heirs also are being kept for its full enjoyment. The sailor's most pressing question is not so much as to the welcome which awaits him in his home, but whether he can ride out the storm, and safely pass the jagged edges of the rocks, on which the waves are dashing angrily. You must assure him of safety for himself, as well as of welcome to his home, if you would put him perfectly at rest. So it were vain for the Apostle to talk of that "long eternity which shall greet our bliss with an individual kiss," unless he could also assure us that we shall be kept from making shipwreck, and becoming castaways. What comfort there is in that word "kept"!

The Greek word translated "**kept**" is borrowed from the camp. It is used in 2Cor. 11:32; Gal. 3:23; Phil. 4:7; and, in each case, conveys the conception of an armed force, employed in sentry or escort duty, surrounding their ward, and interposing a wall of enclosure and defence. Thus does the Divine power surround the saints as a body-guard during their sojourn in this perilous world. God is not only our exceeding great reward, but our shield. The purged eye sees the mountains round about us filled with horses and chariots of protection. We are hidden in the secret of his presence from the pride of man, kept secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues. God hath sent out his light and truth to lead us, and bring us to his holy hill, and to his tabernacles. "Ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the Lord will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your rearward."

It may be that many readers of these lines have come almost to despair. They know and approve the better, but do the worse. Notwithstanding bitter tears, and cries, and soul-anguish, they are constantly being brought into captivity to some besetting sin. How often have their tears been their meat day and night, as they have poured out their soul in the words of the fifty-first Psalm, (Psalm 51) or cried with the Apostle, "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" For all such there is infinite comfort in the announcement that those who have been begotten again, and are therefore sons, may claim to be "kept" by their Father's power unto full and consummated salvation. Oh that from this moment all such may realize to the full the keeping power of God!

1. WHAT THIS KEEPING INVOLVES

It does not mean that we shall lose our sinful nature; which consists in a perpetual tendency and liability to sin. Nor does it mean that we shall become sinless beings, who need not the daily cry for forgiveness; because in the best of us there must ever be much which is grievous in the sight of a holy God. Nor does it mean that we shall cease to be tempted; that alas! cannot be our lot, as long as we are passing through an enemy's land to our inheritance. But it does mean that--though within us there is a strong predisposition toward sin, partly inherited and partly built up by long indulgence in evil habit, and though without us there is a hell full of wicked spirits, each of which is pledged to do his worst to make us fall--yet we may be kept from yielding to known and presumptuous sins, and conducted safely through the "proud waters," so as to stand at last with the OVERCOMERS on the shore of the sea of glass, having the harps of God. Not taken out of the world, but kept from the evil (Rev. 15:2; John 17:15).

Many are the images which suggest themselves to set forth the keeping power of God. What the framework of bone and the eyelid veil are to the delicate organism of the eye; what the shepherd's watchful care is to the flock, which dwells safely in the wilderness, and sleeps in the woods, though young lions are roaring around for their prey; what the lofty walls are to the tender grapes, guarding them from rifling hands and little foxes; what the wing of the mother-bird is to the brood menaced by the hovering kestrel; what the valiant of Israel were to Solomon's bed; what the iron safe is to its valuable contents, defying the robber's hand and the forked tongue of flame--all that is the environing presence of God to his saints. Though dogs compass us, and the assembly of the wicked enclose us, yet there is an inner circle of defense through which they dare not and cannot penetrate.

That there will be strife and war and temptation without, and cowering weakness within, seems implied in every one of these images, and specially in the metaphor we are considering. Of what need were KEEPING, unless there were danger without and frailty within? But amid all, it is evidently possible that we should be kept from stumbling; and spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. "Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." This KEEPING extends to the issues of life, and to the steps or goings of the saints; but it touches these, because it deals so completely with the inner man. There the power of God is exerted on the soul, on the heart, and on the mind: unseen, but all-pervasive; and strong enough to quell the uprising of the wildest passion that ever swept down on the inner nature (Pr 4:23; 1Sa 2:9; Phil. 4:7; 1Pet. 4:19).

2. WHY THIS KEEPING MAY BE CONFIDENTLY EXPECTED

It is demanded by the purpose of God.--We are "elect unto obedience," as the first verses of this chapter tell us; but surely He who has called us with so high a calling will not fail to deal effectually with all that would prevent it from being realized.

It is demanded by the sacrifice of Christ.--The expenditure of Calvary was gladly borne by our Savior--not to deliver us from hell

so much as "to purify unto Himself a people for his own possession, zealous of good works." But is it possible to suppose that the whole scheme of redemption is to be rendered abortive because, though He was able to purchase, He is not able to keep that which He has acquired? During his earthly life He kept those whom the Father had given Him, and none of them was lost, save the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled; surely, then, since all power is now his, He is equally able to keep those who bear his name!

It is demanded by the indwelling of the Spirit--He is most certainly in the heart of each believer; curtained, as of old was the Shekinah by the heavy veil, but still burning as a spark of fire in the most holy place. Above all things, He desires that the entire being, which is his temple, should be kept clean and holy. And if He only is permitted to have his way, He will most certainly reduce the inward chaos to order, and keep the inner empire undisturbed. Would it not be in the highest degree at variance with his loving holy nature to excite desires after holiness in the breast which He would not, or could not, meet? The very intensity of the passion for holiness which He instills is a pledge and harbinger of perfect satisfaction.

The credit of God demands it.--If sin must always master us, so long as we remain in this world, it would seem as if the remedy were not equal to the emergency. Here were indeed a subject for hellish merriment, if God were not able to counter-work the baleful influences which devils exert over human spirits. "Aha," methinks they would cry: "Thou canst make thy saints obedient only by taking them beyond the range of our power; but leave them here within our reach, and Thou canst not keep them from yielding to the temptations which we present."

Take heart, O tempted child of God; thou hast abundant reason to reckon confidently on being "kept" from known transgression.

3. HOW THIS KEEPING IS EFFECTED

"By the power of God."--1Peter 1:5.

Consider that power in creation.--Stand with the exiles in Babylon, and lift up your eyes on high to the starry hosts, spread out like a flock resting in the midnight sky: "He calleth them all by names, by the greatness of his might; for that He is strong in power: not one faileth." And if He can keep the heavenly bodies, revolving through orbits of measureless immensity, so exact to their hours that astronomers can calculate their return with unerring precision, surely He can keep one poor soul in its appointed orbit, especially when it is so eager to be kept (Isa. 40:26).

Consider that power in history.--Not withstanding the free action of human wills, warped and rebellious, He has been able to carry out his plans, and secure results on which He had set his mind from all eternity. And as a standing marvel the Israelite race remains to-day scattered among all peoples, but absorbed by none; isolated and alone, almost in spite of itself. But surely it must be as easy to preserve his Church, consisting as it does of those who are exceedingly desirous of knowing and doing his will (Jer. 33:25, 26).

Consider that power in the resurrection of our Lord.--It raised Him from the dead, past all created excellence, above principalities and powers, until the glorified but human body of Christ passed to the very throne of the Eternal, where no created thing had ever come before. Nay, but more--in raising Him, the Father also raised us in Him. And the Apostle tells us that the very same power which bore Christ from the grave to the throne is extended towards the weakest believer, to lift him also to a similar level of resurrection-being. Surely such a power as this is adequate to our direst necessity (Eph. 1:19, 20).

Consider this power in the human life of Jesus.--He met the devil in the wilderness and in Gethsemane. The prince of this world measured himself in mortal conflict with the Son of God, not once only, but many times. But he was always defeated. His legions were driven forth from haunted lives. He himself fell as lightning from heaven. His head was bruised. His chief allurements and bait, the world, was overcome. His attempt to hold the Savior in the tomb was defeated, as when a man brushes through the cobweb that stretches across his path. And what Jesus did for Himself, He waits to do on the behalf of each of his own, and to repeat in each of us the conquests and triumphs of his own life on earth.

It is hardly necessary to say that the power of God is put forth by the Holy Spirit.--He lives in our inner man, and exerts there his marvelous energy. He keeps Himself unseen, and focuses all our thought on the Lord Jesus, as light is sometimes made to fall on some beautiful face which attracts the observer's entire attention. Thus it happens that though the brunt of the inner war is borne by the Spirit (Gal. 5:17), yet the believer is occupied with Jesus, appealing to Him in the conflict, and softly breathing his name as a talisman of victory. Yet why do we need to distinguish thus, when They are One?

The power of the Holy Ghost works through our faith.--God will do all that we can trust Him to do; but He does not pledge Himself to work independently of our faith. When faith is in strong and blessed exercise, there is no limit to its possibilities, because it taps the reservoirs of Omnipotence, and opens the sluice-gates, so that all God's power begins to flow into the soul. Our faith is the means of our receptivity; the straits through which the ocean of Divine fullness pours its tides.

But if our faith be meager and struggling, we cannot expect mighty deliverances. Smite but thrice upon the ground, and Syria will still

defy you (2Kings 13:19). If you do not expect that God is able to keep you, do not be surprised if you are not kept. According to your faith, or unbelief, so will it be done to you.

Would you realize God's keeping grace? Give yourself entirely up to Him, renouncing all trust in yourself, and all connection with evil. Choose definitely and for ever the lot of the cross of Jesus. And then trust Jesus to keep you. Whenever temptation approaches, look up, and say, Jesus, I trust thy keeping power." Ask the Holy Spirit to keep you so constantly in this attitude that it may become the habit of your soul to look to Jesus when temptation assails. Trust Him to keep you trusting. Nourish your faith by devout meditation on the promises of God. Do not look at your weakness or your foes, but at the mighty bulwarks of God's salvation, which He has appointed. "The Lord is thy Keeper." Hear his gracious words, and hide them in your heart: "I the Lord do keep it; I will water it every moment: lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." Surely it were the height of blasphemy to affirm that the Almighty is not able, or willing, to keep the soul that trusts Him. Only man would shake the fugitive dove out of his bosom to the hawk!

Thus will you await the consummation of your salvation, which shall be yours at the coming of the Lord. Already it is finished and prepared; but it waits to be revealed. And when, amid the breaking light and exuberant gladness of perfect deliverance, you review the pathway by which you have come, you will better realize your indebtedness to His wondrous grace, in keeping that which you committed to Him against that day.

IV. FOR THOSE IN HEAVINESS

"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."--1Peter 1:6-7.

1. HEAVINESS!

"He began to be sorrowful, and very heavy."

It was only through the darkness of that garden that He could pass upward to the glory of the resurrection morn. And it is impossible to depict the condition of deep human suffering more accurately than by the words in heaviness. As the leaves of the laurel are pressed to the earth by the weight of a thunder shower, so are souls made heavy "by manifold temptations."

Temptation here is equivalent to trial. In other days the same word was used indiscriminately of the testings, which befall the saints, on the part of God and of the devil. The one, that we may know ourselves as He knows us, and that the first small germs of good which He has implanted may develop by use into strong and beautiful maturity. The other, that the evil within us may be made manifest, and hurried into such action as will cast down our hopes, and sow the seeds of future indulgence. The motive of God's testings is benevolence, that we may be nobler, sweeter, riper. The motive of Satan's is malignity, that we may be hastened down the sliding-scale of sin. Thus God is said in the Scriptures to tempt men, and yet not to tempt them (Ge. 22:1; Jas 1:13). He tests and tries them, but never allures them into evil.

In our desire to distinguish between these two methods of testing, we for the most part employ different words, using trial of the divinely-ordered discipline of life, and temptation of the attacks of the great enemy of our souls. And, therefore, it is more appropriate to modern usage to speak of being in heaviness "through manifold trials." This is also suggested by the Revised Version. (See also Jas 1:2.)

"Manifold trials."--In this Epistle, as in a mirror, we can see reflected the dark shadows which were gathering over these scattered saints. Buffeted for doing well; reviled and suffering; exposed to railing and terror; evil spoken of; tried in a fiery trial; partakers of Christ's sufferings; reproached for the name of Christ; judgment beginning at the house of God; experiencing the same afflictions as fell to the lot of brethren throughout the world: such are some of the hints given throughout this Epistle of the sources of their manifold trials. To "suffer as a Christian" (1Peter 1:16), meant the loss of business, repute, and home; desertion by parents, children, and friends; misrepresentation, hatred, and even death. The new convert became the target for every weapon, hurled from any quarter.

For ourselves, trials come generally from three sources: those brought on us by others; those caused by our own sins, mistakes, and indiscretions; and those sent to us directly from God, our Father. And beneath this various pressure, what wonder that the heart is bowed down! How apt was the summons of Jesus to the heavy-laden; and how incessant the great procession of such passing down into the Vale of Tears, at the end of which stands his cross, behind which the light of morning is breaking!

The Apostle does not blame this heaviness.--The Stoic scorns to shed a tear: the Christian is not forbidden to weep; yea, he follows the best example in letting his tears have free course. We must not despise the chastening of the Lord, any more than we should faint under it. Strong crying and tears befit sons who are learning obedience by suffering. The soul may be dumb with

excessive grief, as the shearer's scissors pass over the quivering flesh; or, when the heart is on the point of breaking beneath the meeting surges of trial, the sufferer may seek relief by crying out with a loud voice.

But there is something even better. They say that springs of sweet fresh water well up amid the brine of salt seas; that the fairest Alpine flowers bloom in the wildest and most rugged mountain passes; that the noblest psalms were the outcome of the profoundest agony of soul. Be it so. And thus amid manifold trials souls which love God will find reasons for bounding, leaping joy. Though deep call to deep, yet the Lord's song will be heard in silver cadence through the night. And it is possible in the darkest hour that ever swept a human life to bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Have you learnt this lesson yet? Not simply to endure God's will; nor only to choose it; nor only to trust it--but to rejoice in it with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Of such joy there are two sources: first, the understanding of the nature and meaning of trial; second, the soul's love and faith in its unseen Lord. There is enough in these two for unsullied and transcendent joy; in fact, we may question whether we ever truly drink of Christ's joy, till all other sources of joy are eliminated by earthly sorrow, and we are driven to seek that joyous blessedness which no earthly sun can wither and no winter freeze (Hab. 3:17, 18, 19).

2. THE NATURE AND MEANING OF TRIAL

Trial is here compared to fire; that subtle element, which is capable of inflicting such exquisite torture on our seared and agonized flesh; which cannot endure the least taint or remnant of impurity, but wraps its arms around objects committed to it with eager intensity to set them free and make them pure; which is careless of agony, if only its passionate yearning may be satisfied; which lays hold of things more material than itself, loosening their texture, snapping their fetters, and bearing them upwards in its heaven-aspiring energy. What better emblem could there be for God, and for those trials which He permits or sends, and in the heart of which He is to be found? Ah, the agony of suffering is keen to bear--when friends forsake, and enemies reproach, and the work of years is suddenly shattered, and the soul is stung with pain and shame and ingratitude, with disappointment and bereavement: such suffering is to the soul what fire is to the flesh.

(1) But this fire is a refiner's fire.--The reference is evident. And we are taken back to an olden prophecy, from which we learn that when the Lord comes to his temple, He sits as a refiner beside the crucible (Mal. 3:3). We may well take the shoes from off our feet, when we enter the chamber of some tried Christian, for certainly the Lord is there.

It is He who permits the trial.--The evil thing may originate in the malignity of a Judas; but by the time it reaches us it has become the cup which our Father has given us to drink. The waster may purpose his own lawless and destructive work; but he cannot go an inch beyond the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Satan himself must ask permission ere he touches a hair of the patriarch's head (Job 1:8, 9, 10, 11, 12). The point up to which we may be tested is fixed by consummate wisdom. The weapon may hurt and the fire sting; but they are in the hands which redeemed us. Nothing can befall us without God's permission, and his permissions are his appointments, we cannot be the sport of blind fate or chance; for in trial we are still in the hands of the living Saviour.

It is He who superintends the trial.--No earthly friend may be near; but in every furnace there is One like the Son of Man. In every flood of high waters He stands beside us--staying the heart with promises, instilling words of faith and hope, recalling the blessed past, pointing to the radiant future, hushing fear, as once He stilled the dismay of his disciples on the lake: such is the ministry of Jesus. And as the sufferer looks back on the trial, he says, "I never felt Him so near before; and if it had not been for what He was to me, I could never have lived through it."

It is He who watches the progress of the trial.--No mother bending over her suffering child is more solicitous than is He--suiting the trial to your strength--keeping his finger on your pulse so as to stay the flame when the heart begins to flutter--only too eager to see the scum pass off, and his own face reflected from the face of the molten metal.

Happy would it be for us if, instead of looking at our trials, we would look away to his face, only eager to understand his meaning, and to learn his intended lesson, so that as the outward man perishes, the inward man may be renewed day after day. Whilst the marble wastes beneath the sculptor's hand, the image grows; so should each loss in our estate or circumstance have a corresponding gain in spiritual conformity to Christ.

(2) Trial is only for a season.--"Now for a season, ye are in heaviness" (1Peter 1:6). The great Husbandman is not always threshing. The showers soon pass. Weeping may only tarry for the few hours of the short summer night: it must be gone at daybreak. Our light affliction is but for a moment.

There is a subtle distinction here between the most precious and enduring of material substances and the faith of the Christian soul. "Gold that perisheth" (1Peter 1:7). Gold outlasts carved wood, and the potter's art, and most things else. It may be attenuated and worn by long use, yet will it survive the gentle hand on which it has spoken of unending love for half a century. Yet gold will eventually wear out. But there is that in each of us which cannot perish. The mere accident of death cannot affect it, nor the flight of

time, nor the descent of all created things into the gulf of oblivion. It is eternal as the God who inspired it. And compared to that boundless existence which is its birthright, how paltry and insignificant do the longest trials appear, though they have lain for many years on the soul and life! Judged by the measureless span of eternity, they are but for a season, and will pass as completely from memory as the clouds of early morning before the meridian glory of a long summer day.

(3) Trial is for a purpose--"It needs be." There is nothing harder to bear than the apparent aimlessness of sorrow. A new interest comes into the monotony of prison-discipline as soon as the convicts feel that their toils are achieving some positive result. And when no purpose seems secured by our sufferings or toils, hope dies.

With the Christian there is no fear of this. There is a utility in every trial. It is intended to reveal the secrets of our hearts; to humble us and prove us; to winnow us as corn is shaken in a sieve; to detach us from the earthly and visible; to create in us an eager desire for the realities which can alone quench our cravings and endure for ever. We must not look on trial as punishment for the past; because all penalty has been borne for us by our Redeemer. But each trial points to the future, and is intended to make us partakers of his holiness, and to work in us the peaceable fruit of righteousness. The very fact of trial proves that there is something in us very precious to our Lord: else He would not spend so much pains and time on us. "We do not prune brambles, or cast stones into the crucible, or plough the sea-sands." And Christ would not test us if He did not see the precious ore of faith mingled in the rocky matrix of our nature; and it is to bring this out into purity and beauty that He forces us through the fiery ordeal. Be patient, O sufferer: He must love you, or He would not chasten you; you must be his, or He would not take such pains with you; you must be capable of some high service which can only be secured through pain, or He would not plunge you into the refining fires. You must be able to bear the fire, or He would not pass you through it (Nu 31:23).

The result will more than compensate us--"Found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

The gold is well repaid for the fires when it encircles the monarch's brow; the diamond for the lapidary's wheel when it glistens on the neck of beauty. And we shall be more than recompensed for all our trials, when we see how they wrought out the far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. To have one word of God's commendation; to be honoured before the holy angels; to be glorified in Christ, so as to be better able to flash back his glory on Himself--ah! this will more than repay for all. Let us live more constantly in that future, under the powers of the world to come!--as soldiers solace themselves in the arduous campaign by talking over their watch-fires of the welcome and rewards which will greet them on their return. "Now they do it to receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible" (1Co 9:25). All the blessings which accrue through trial are only possible to us, however, when the heart meekly accepts it from the hand of God, and opens to the operation of the Holy Spirit. Trial alone may harden, as the fire which softens wax hardens clay to bricks. But when trial is accompanied with the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, it is as a precious oil that does not break the head (Psa. 141:5).

See how much God thinks of faith--It is priceless in his esteem. What gold is to the miser, faith is to God. It is the root of all other grace, the germ of the saintly life, the key to the Divine storehouse, the foot of the heavenly ladder, the earthward pier of the arch that bridges the abyss between the unseen and the seen. To make it strong in one poor heart is a matter of extreme value in his sight. And since it can only grow strong by use, and exercise, and strain, be not surprised if He expose you to discipline, graduated according to your power, but becoming ever severer, until beneath his gracious tuition the faith, which once shivered at sight of the shallows, will plunge fearlessly into the deep, and do business in mighty waters.

V. CHRIST UNSEEN BUT LOVED

"Whom, having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."--1Peter 1:8-9.

THE sixth verse begins, and the eighth ends, with a Greek word expressive of leaping, bounding joy (to rejoice exceedingly.) It is strange that such a word should be used of the feelings experienced by handfuls of scattered saints over whom the dark thunder-clouds of persecution were beginning to gather heavily. And yet it is not strange when we study the sources of that joy, which are included within these golden brackets, the first of which we considered in our previous chapter. Is there not joy in the thought that trial is the refiner's fire, sharp but salutary--the necessary preparation for results of immeasurable blessedness? And is here not yet deeper cause for joy, triumphant and exulting, in the relation into which we have been brought with Jesus Christ our Lord?

Yes, the iron may hiss, and the fire sting; friends may desert, and foes may threaten; the cold waters may creep up around our person, and the shadows of the dark valley fling themselves between us and the Sunshine; nevertheless, whatever be the nature or severity of our manifold trials, it shall be enough for us to know that they are working out the results of untold glory, and that nothing can break that holy and blessed personal relationship into which we have entered with Him whom Bernard never tired of addressing as Jesus Master.

Jesus, then, is the Heart and Center of these burning words; words which recall the thrice-repeated question of the Lake of Galilee, Lovest thou me? and the never-to-be-forgotten beatitude of the upper chamber, Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed! (John 20:29). And is not this text an epitome of Christianity? What makes us Christians except that we believe in and love Him whose receding form was veiled by the chariot-cloud that swept beneath Him as He passed home to heaven? We may accept and appreciate the words of many of the world's great thinkers, whilst we concern ourselves but little with the men themselves; but we may not do this with the words of Christ, and still be Christians. We cannot take his words, and ignore Him. Christianity is the personal relationship of the soul to Christ. Begin, not with his words, but with Himself; and when you possess Him, you cannot fail of having all He said, and did, and is, and will be, world without end.

1. AN UNSEEN CHRIST-- A POSSIBLE HINDRANCE TO EXULTING JOY.

"Not having seen"; "Now ye see Him not." To a superficial thinker, this privation of a personal vision of Jesus might be deemed sufficient to put all after-ages on a lower platform than that glad first one which looked upon his face--the face which reflected the moods of his tranquil and holy nature; which lit up homes of sorrow and lives of despair with the radiance of hope; which attracted little children to his embrace; and which often shone with the gleam of celestial communications, glancing between Him and God. Surely not to have seen it might count as an irreparable loss!

An old divine said that he wished he could have seen three things--Rome in her glory; Paul preaching at Athens; and Christ in the body. And it was because of their desire to satisfy themselves, and to meet this great longing, that the great painters of Christendom covered the walls of picture galleries with conceptions of the face of Jesus. Crowds have stood transfixed and touched before these masterpieces of art. But who has not turned from the very noblest of them with a sigh of dissatisfaction, and a secret conviction that even if the sublimest feature were to be taken out of each separate picture and all combined into one, the face so composed must still fall infinitely short of that in which Deity and humanity met, and shone, and wept, and loved. We shall never see anything worthy of that face till we see Him as He is. "They shall see his face," and "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 22:4; 2 Cor. 4:6).

But is there not hardship and irreparable loss in this? Not so. He can be nearer, dearer to us to-day, than if those old blessed days in which He walked with his disciples over the hills of Galilee, or fell asleep in the stern of Peter's boat, had been drawn out like a golden thread throughout the centuries. We could not have always had Him then. Domestic duties; the needs of the world; the requirements of food, or business, or sleep--must have taken us from his side. Or, at the best, we could only have known Him as part of a great multitude, all of whom would have been equally eager to possess Him for themselves. In the press of saints and apostles we must have necessarily occupied the outer rim of the vast crowd, and been satisfied with a transient glimpse, or with such beams as those which travel from our sun to Uranus, on the extreme limits of our system. And amid it all, there might have been a strong temptation to such earthly, sensuous love as made the woman of the crowd exclaim, "Blessed is she that bare thee, and the breasts which thou hast sucked;" expressions which He corrected by immediately recalling the thoughts of the crowd to the greater blessedness of those who "hear the word of God, and keep it" (Luke 11:28).

If we had seen Him once, or might see Him still, our joy would have been dashed with the pain of losing Him; of intermittent fellowship; or of the necessity of sharing Him with others. It would have been too deeply-rooted in the outward and physical. It would have languished when manifold trials intercepted its vision. It could never have possessed that vigour; that independence of circumstances; that power to defy imprisonment, solitude, and desertion; that buoyant and heavenward ardour--which indicate that its temper is celestial, its nature Spirit-given. Therefore the invisibility of Jesus, which might have seemed inimical to our joy, so far from being so, is rather a condition of its existence in the soul; and for this reason, that as a spiritual presence our dear Lord can be more to us and more with us, than if He had lingered ever on our earth. Did He not therefore say Himself, "It is expedient for you that I go away"? Christ dwelling in our heart by the Spirit, with us, around us, in us, is infinitely more than He could have been to us, though, like Peter, James, and John, we had been the chosen companions of His earthly life.

2. TWO LINKS UNITE US TO THE UNSEEN LORD.

"Ye love." "Believing" (1Peter 1:8). It is hard to say which is first or chief. We cannot love without believing, nor can we believe without loving. Faith is light; and love is heat. Where one enters, the other follows. Woven in the texture of each of heaven's sunbeams, we cannot have one without the other; and our joy will be in direct proportion to the presence of these twin celestial sisters in our souls.

(2A) AS TO LOVE

No man is a Christian who does not love the Lord Jesus "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema" (1Cor. 16:22). This is the touchstone of trial for each one of us; not what we profess or say, but whether we love, and how much. But let us remember that love reveals itself differently according to that aspect of Christ's person or work on which the Spirit has fixed

the beholder's eye. In some, conscious of a great deliverance, it takes the form of gratitude. In others, smitten with the beauty of his character, of complacency. In others, again, pre-occupied with his claims, of reverential devotion to his service. The symptoms of its presence are manifold. Sometimes adoring silence; at others irrepressible tears; or the sudden burning of the cheek; or unostentatious acts of mercy; or steadfastness in confessing Him at all costs. Love betrays itself, whether it fetches water from the well of Bethlehem at peril of life, or comes with precious spikenard to anoint the dear body of the dead.

Those that love Christ most, often accuse themselves of not loving Him Their love so conceives of Him that He seems deserving of something infinitely better than they can give. They love Him so much, that they would be almost prepared to make way for any who could love Him better; and yet to stand aside would be agony. Let such take heart! He who knows all things, knows how much they love. And, after all, love is measured, not by feelings, or sighs, or tears, but by acts. You love Christ by just as much as you are prepared to do, or suffer or give up for Him.

How may we love Christ more?--Spend much time alone in contemplating what He has done for you; and what He is, as the "chiefest among ten thousand" and the "altogether lovely." Stir the inner fire by means of memory; and let hope pile on it the fuel of promise till it begin to blaze! Cultivate the habit of speaking aloud to Him, in an empty chamber, or a lonely walk, until He be interlaced in the tiniest episodes of existence. Open your heart to the entrance of the Holy Spirit, shedding abroad the love of God in the heart, and gathering the rays of that love into a burning focus, so that you may love God back with love which has come from his heart into yours. And, very specially, accustom yourself to do, for the sake of his dear love, many things which cost you self-sacrifice and effort. As we show love to others we understand his love to ourselves. "Every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1John 4:7, 8).

The key to the knowledge of the love of Jesus is not in singing rapturous hymns, nor in seeking to arouse intense emotion; but in quietly doing daily deeds of self-denial for His sake.

And surely this is the way to sow ourselves as corns of wheat in the ground (John 12:24); whilst He measures the least act of love, not by the magnitude of the deed itself, but by the strength of the love which prompts it. It is astonishing how quickly we graduate in the school of love, when we begin to put in practice all we know.

(2B) AS TO FAITH.

Who is there of us that does not often cry with the disciples: "Lord, increase our faith!"? Certain it is that increased faith would mean increased joy. But are we all prepared to use the means within our reach for obtaining this increased faith? The germ of faith is the creative gift of God; but its nurture and culture lie with us, by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

The conditions of its growth are these:--

There must be, **first**, the putting away from the heart and life of all known evil and inconsistency. The reason for much of the weak faith around is to be found in the permission of forbidden and questionable things, which clog and oppress the soul. These are the birdlime on the soul's wings--the hood on the inner vision.

Next, there must be time given for quiet musing over the statements and promises of the Word of God, till they assume a definite shape as eternal facts.

Lastly, there must be habitual obedience to every known duty; so that, as the will of God is revealed, it shall be instantly embodied in action; and this, notwithstanding any difficulty that may line the path. Where these rules are observed, faith will grow exceedingly, and will make the unseen Saviour "a living bright reality" to the soul which yearns for a hand that can never fail, a heart that can never cease to throb.

3. THE RESULTING JOY.

Is there not joy in love when a barrier is broken down which had estranged for years; when confession is made and forgiveness is granted; when heart flows to heart; when the golden key of love unlocks the choicest and most sacred treasures? To know that since we love Christ; we must have been loved; that we are loved with a love which will never let us go, but which will cling to us through life and death and eternal ages, not for anything good or worthy in us, but because of its own sweet will and choice; to be persuaded that nothing, not even our failures and inconsistencies, can separate us from the love of Christ--this, surely, must thrill us with joy, however great and manifold may be the trials through which we are called to pass.

Is there no joy in faith?--"Think with what joy the long-imprisoned debtor, drowned in debt, receives a full discharge and his liberty; or a condemned malefactor the news of his pardon--and this will somewhat resemble it, and yet fall far short of the joy which faith imparts, by bringing Christ into the soul and forgiveness of sins in Him. Nor is this all, for the believing soul is not only a debtor acquitted, but enriched besides with a new and great estate, having a right to the unsearchable riches of Christ, to the favour of God, and to the dignity of his child."

Such joy is unspeakable.--There are times of high tide in the believer's soul, when he dare not speak. Words seem superfluous and empty. The tides overflow their banks, and pour their volume in unspoken admiration into the heart of God.

And full of glory.--It is of the same substance, if not of the same bulk and weight, as the glory which awaits us on the other side. There are moments of heaven upon earth; prelibations of the river of life; stray notes of the angel choruses; Eshcol grapes from the vineyards of the land of promise; flowers from the parterres of Paradise. Oh for more of heaven on the way to heaven! A prayer which we may almost answer for ourselves by seeking more of Him who is Himself the heaven of heaven; and so adopting Bengel's motto:

**"Christ in the heart;
heaven in the heart;
the heart in heaven."**

VI. THE SUFFERING AND GLORIES OF CHRIST

"Concerning which salvation the prophets sought and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what time or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did point unto when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glories that should follow them. To whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto you, did they minister these things, which now have been announced unto you through them that preached the gospel unto you by the Holy Ghost sent forth from heaven; which things angels desire to look into."--1Peter 1:10-12 (R.V.)

THIRTY years, full of varied and absorbing interest, had well-nigh passed away since Peter--amid the gloom of Gethsemane; or as one of the little crowd of servants in the high priest's hall; or as a heart-broken spectator on the outer rim of the crowd--had been an eye-witness of the sufferings of Christ; sufferings from the endurance of which he had done his utmost to dissuade his Master. But they were as fresh as though they had been borne but yesterday, like the blood-red of the sandstone rocks, which remains as vivid as on the morning of creation, though thousands of autumns have strewn them with the fading hues of nature's many-coloured dress. Throughout the Epistle there is repeated reference to the sufferings which culminated at Calvary. But how different is the tone in which the Apostle alludes to them! A vast change has passed over him since, on the eve of the Transfiguration, he said: "This shall not be unto Thee." That which had aroused his strongest protestation is now better understood, and has become the theme of his tenderest love (comp. Matt. 16:22 with 1Pet. 1:11; 2:21, 22, 23; 3:18; 4:1-13; 5:1).

By those sufferings, our salvation has been achieved.--SALVATION is a great word. And some glimpses of the width of its contents are discovered in the Apostle's threefold use of it here (1Peter 1:5, 9, 10). It is so great and glorious that the saintliest souls cannot in this world fully realize all its blessedness. It will only be revealed "in the last time" (1Peter 1:5), because it includes the deliverance of our bodies from the bondage of corruption, and their transfiguration into the likeness of the body of Christ's glory; a result which cannot be attained till the second coming of the Lord. Moreover, "salvation" includes something more than deliverance from the penalty due to sin, to which its meaning is so often limited.

It is SALVATION FOR SOULS (1Peter 1:9)--that is: it not only makes them safe--but also sound, healthy, wholesome, and whole; breathing into them the very nature of God; and replacing corruption with the life of the eternal world. Well may the Apostle find an equivalent for such a salvation, covering as it does our entire nature, in the sweet old word GRACE. Who shall estimate the "grace" that has come to us in the coming of such a salvation as this? (1Peter 1:10).

On this "salvation" we must not linger longer now, fascinating though the theme must be to those who owe all to it, both in this life and the next. But, as we pass from it, we ask our readers to inquire whether they have experienced it, not only as a past act, breaking the entail of a deserved penalty; or as a future act, uniting spotless soul and stainless body in the presence of the King; but as a living present enjoyment, securing for them daily, hourly, victory over known sin, whether suggested from within or by the malevolence of our great spiritual foe.

The sufferings of Christ, then, must engage our thought, and under a peculiar aspect.--In a picture of the crucifixion, by a great modern painter, we stand behind the cross, not seeing the sufferer, but only the shadows of three crosses falling down the hill-slope, the central one being the deepest and broadest of the three. But the faces of those passing by, or standing near, are toward us, and are filled with looks which tell the story of the tragedy in a way which the minutest delineation of horrors could never have done. So we are studying the sufferings of Christ in their effect on the witness of the Spirit; the testimony of the prophets; the preaching of the Apostles; and the rapt gaze of the angels.

"It testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ."

The name here given to the Holy Spirit is very significant. He is called the Spirit of Christ. One as He is with the Father and the Son in the mystery of the Holy Trinity, and proceeding as a stream of holy influence from their common throne, yet He bends all his influence to reveal and glorify our blessed Lord. In Himself He is ineffably holy, loving, mighty--whom to know is everlasting blessedness. And yet, with marvellous and divine unobtrusiveness, He withdraws Himself from our notice, only anxious to focus all attention and interest on the Christ (John 16:13-15).

Until Jesus was glorified, the Spirit was not fully given (John 7:39)--not poured out freely upon all, as afterwards at Pentecost (Acts 2:17), but in measure, and occasionally (comp. Judges 13:25). Even before the Incarnation, He broke out in witness to the coming Saviour, and with irrepressible love gave testimony of Jesus; as when the voice of the Father refused to be longer bound by the restraints of a self-imposed silence, but broke out in benediction after the baptism of the Son in the waters of Jordan.

Nor is it wonderful that the Spirit's testimony pointed in the direction of Christ's sufferings. The offering up of Christ in death is said to have been through the "Eternal Spirit" (Heb. 9:14). It was an act, in which the Trinity as a whole participated. It was the crystallization in the concrete of an eternal thought in the counsel and purpose of God (Rev. 13:8). It was probably the most stupendous event in the existence of the Blessed God. How, then, can we wonder at the Holy Spirit anticipating the discoveries of time, and giving premonitory hints and signs, and anticipations of the sufferings of the cross? It is surely a mistake, then, for us to make so little, in meditation and in ministry, of that which is the supreme point of interest to the Spirit of Christ in the work of the Saviour upon our world. The emphasis that He lays on the sufferings of Christ, like the word search on a cairn, might indicate what inestimable treasures lie beneath.

And if the Blessed Spirit dwell so lovingly and gladly on the sufferings, how much more on the glories of the Lord! The Apostle laid the emphasis there when he said, "Yea, rather, that was raised from the dead" (Ro 8:34, R.V.). And deservedly, because the glories are the crown and flower and fruit of the sufferings; the attestation of his Deity; the Divine imprimatur on his work; the reward for the travail of his soul. Stay, my soul, to recount the glories, one by one, of the Resurrection morning; the Ascension mount; the triumphal procession through all ranks of being; the session at the right hand of God; the Second Advent; and the Millennial Reign.

2. THE BURDEN OF THE GOODLY FELLOWSHIP OF PROPHETS.

From the age of Samuel these men appear. Very zealous for the Lord of Hosts, and full of the loftiest patriotism, they fulfilled a great ministry to their times, serving the same purpose as the Tribunes of the People in ancient Rome, and the public press to-day. They stood up before kings for the rights of the people, as they stood up before the people for the rights of God. Nathan before David; Elijah before Ahab; Isaiah before Ahaz; Jeremiah before Zedekiah; John before Herod.

With us, the word "**Prophet**" looks out on the future, penetrating its veil; but in the original it means "bubbling up," as when the Psalmist said that his heart was bubbling up with good matter (Psa. 45:1), like springs forcing their way out into the desert waste, making it smile and bloom. Nevertheless, in their public utterances, which were primarily addressed to men of their time, there were depths of meaning, references, and anticipations, which demanded a fuller realization than could be found in a series of national events, however momentous.

It was the distinguishing mark of the Jews, that, unlike other nations, their golden age lay before them as a radiant goal, and that their greatest Hero was not their father, but his remote Descendant. Expectation stooped forward, intent on catching the first foot-fall of the coming King, who should gather up and satisfy the loftiest hopes. Of these expectations and hopes the prophets were the chief exponents. But this would not have sufficed to explain the fulness and minuteness of detail which characterize their words. There was an element present which can be accounted for by no earthly or human prescience. These holy men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Ghost (2 Peter 1:21, R.V.).

The Spirit of Christ was in them.--First, He was in them as the Spirit of Revelation, communicating truths which they could not have foreseen or discovered; truths which even baffled their understanding after they had received them. Next, He was in them as the Spirit of inspiration, affording spiritual aid in promulgating truth; so that the Bible contains God's truth stated in human words, which nevertheless give an adequate and sufficient statement of the Divine intention and purpose.

And it is easy, therefore, to understand that the burden of their words would be the same as that which engrossed the blessed Spirit. Through them He testified of the sufferings and the glory. The crimson cord of Calvary surrounds every window in the sacred book. In each voice there is the wail of the cross and the hallelujah of resurrection. Moses and Elias speak of the decease (the exode) to be accomplished. And thus, as the Master talked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, He was able to expound to them in all the Scriptures that Christ ought to suffer and to enter into his glory (Luke 24:26, 27, 46). Well, too, might Paul reason at Thessalonica for three whole Sabbath days, opening and alleging that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead (Acts 17:3).

But though the prophets spake of these things, they but imperfectly understood them. They searched into the very matters of which they were made the organs and channels. Like Daniel, they "heard, but understood not" (Dan. 12:8). They could not interpret the hieroglyphs of the dates, nor foresee the mystery and glory of the coming days. And often were the saintliest Jews puzzled at the marvellous conjunction of death with life; of travail with triumph; of darkness with light--on the pages of their prophetic books.

They had to content themselves with ministering to us; and they have performed a very efficient service: because the simplest believer has now an irrefragable testimony to the Divine truthfulness of Scripture, in being able to compare, the predictions of the Old Testament with their fulfilment in the New, fitting each other as the two sides of a tally, or as a key and lock. There is no proof of the Divine authority of the Bible greater than this.

3. THE PREACHING OF THE APOSTLES

Was full of the same theme (1Peter 1:12). The Gospel which they announced was the tidings of the death and resurrection of their Lord. They preached Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. They gloried above all things in the cross. It was a matter of perfect indifference that to the Jews it was a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness: the Apostles persisted in declaring that God had made that same Jesus, whom men had crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36; 4:10).

And with such preaching the Holy Ghost was able to co-operate.--The Apostles preached in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit is said in this verse to have announced these things through them. It was a theme which attracted all his tenderest, mightiest interest. He who spake in the Prophets, spake in and with the Apostles, working powerfully on human hearts by their ministry. And so their preaching, if not with enticing words of man's wisdom, was in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. Yes, and if only men will still dare to preach the doctrine of the cross, they will find again, other things being equal, that results will accrue which bear the Divine hall-mark.

4. THE THEME OF THE ANGELS

Is the same blessed topic. They desire to "look into" these things. They bend aside, as did the cherubim over the mercy-seat, where these truths were set forth in the sprinkled blood. They may have held high debate about the full import of the Saviour's death; but though they cannot penetrate all its mysterious depths, yet they set to music all they know, crying, "Worthy the Lamb that was slain!" The cross attracts the keenest interest of bright celestial spirits.

It may be that those sufferings have brought angels nearer God; but in any case, they have given deep and marvellous glimpses into his heart; such as else could never have come to them. Rightly they are lost in admiration and praise.

If the angels, with their opportunities of knowledge, find ever fresh fields of interest and investigation in the sufferings of Christ and the glories that are to follow, how little do the wisest of us know of them! We are but ankle-deep at the furthest in this fathomless ocean. We are still at the alphabet--the primer of knowledge.

But surely enough has been said to invest the Saviour's sufferings with new interest, as we turn to them again to find heights, depths, lengths, and breadths of meaning, which have engaged and baffled prophets and kings, angels and saints.

VII. YE SHALL BE HOLY

"Wherefore girding up the loins of your mind, be sober and set your hope perfectly on the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as children of obedience, not fashioning yourselves according to your former lusts in the time of your ignorance: but like as He which called you is holy, be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living; because it is written, Ye shall be holy; for I am holy. And if ye call on Him as Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to each man's work, pass the time of your sojourning in fear." 1Peter 1:13-17 (R.V.).

THE "wherefore" with which this paragraph opens gathers up the premises of the preceding verses, and uses them as a massive platform of solid masonry on which to erect the battery of appeal to which the Apostle now addresses himself. Because our destiny is what it is; because Jesus Christ is what He is; because our salvation has been the theme of prophets, apostles, martyrs, angels; therefore... And the aim of his appeal is Holiness.--

"Be ye yourselves also holy in all manner of living."

The cry for HOLINESS rings through the Bible. It is the keynote of Leviticus, from which this quotation is made (cp. 1Peter 1:16 with Lev 11:44; 19:2; 20:7, 26, &c.): and it is equally the supreme demand of the New Testament. In point of fact, all the wondrous machinery of redemption, from the distant choice of eternity to the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, has had this

for its purpose, that we, who have been the subjects of the grace of the Persons of the Eternal Trinity, should resemble them in the holiness which is the perpetual burden of heaven's rapturous minstrelsy--that song which was heard by the evangelic prophet Isaiah from the Temple courts, in the year that King Uzziah died; but which was still unfinished when the beloved Apostle John detected it amid the break of the Aegean Sea around the lone island of his banishment; and which will never cease, world without end:

"Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God the Almighty" (Isa 6:3; Rev. 4:8).

Holiness is the property of God alone--It is the totality of the Divine attributes; the sum of the Eternal and Infinite Being of Godhead; the essence of Deity; the chord made by the harmonious blending of Divine qualities; the beam woven from the many colours of Divine perfections; the expression in a single term of all that goes to make up the moral nature of the great Spirit whom we call GOD. It is underived in its source; unlimited in its measure; insupportable in its naked and unveiled splendour by the eye of any creature which He has made "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?" (Exod. 15:11). No tongue then shall dare to challenge God's right to declare Himself as the Holy One of Israel, or to say in the words before us, "I am holy."

Such holiness is evidently possible to us.--

See, the holy God has "called" us to it (1Peter 1:15).

"God hath not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness" (1 Thess. 4:7).

He "hath called us with a holy calling" (2 Tim. 1:9). All partakers of the heavenly calling are called "holy brethren" (Heb. 3:1).

But God would not summon us to heights we could not scale, or to tasks we could not perform. His CALL involves two facts--first, that his holiness is within our reach; secondly, that He is prepared to supply all that is necessary to effect in us that to which He calls us. God is pledged to make us holy; or He will expose Himself to the mockery of his foes. But we need not fear for Him. He counted the cost before He issued his proclamation; and He is well able to finish that of which He laid the foundation in the great depths of Calvary (Luke 14:29, 30).

Nor is such holiness for saints and apostles alone; or only for the special golden days which visit most lives--days of feast and song and transfiguration. The Divine ideal is more comprehensive far. "Holy in all manner of living" (1Peter 1:15, R.V.).

Zechariah foretold the time when the inscription on the high priest's mitre should be written even on the bells of the horses: "Holiness to the Lord." And it is God's will that that motto should be engraved on house bells, and office bells, and shop bells; on dinner bells and factory bells; so that in every department of our lives there may be sweet music made to life's great Lord. Holiness at every turn, and in every incident of our daily walk, like the golden tinkle which betrayed each movement of Israel's high priest (Ex 28:33, 34, 35; Zech. 14:20, 21).

There is only one way of becoming holy, as God is: and it is the obvious one of opening the entire being to the all-pervading presence of the Holy One.

None of us can acquire holiness apart from God. It dwells in God alone. Holiness is only possible as the soul's possession of God; nay, better still, as God's possession of the soul. It never can be inherent, or possessed apart from the Divine fulness, any more than a river can flow on if it is cut off from its fountain head. We are holy up to the measure in which we are God-possessed. The least holy man is he who shuts God up to the strictest confinement, and to the narrowest limits of his inner being; partitioning Him off from daily life by heavy curtains of neglect and unbelief. He is holier who more carefully denies self, and who seeks a larger measure of Divine indwelling. The holiest is the man who yields himself most completely to be influenced, swayed, possessed, inspired, by that Spirit who longs to make us to the fullest extent partakers of the Divine nature.

Wouldst thou be holier?-- There is but one way. Thou must have more of God in thee. Holiness is the beauty of the Lord God of hosts. Thou canst not separate the one from the other. To have it thou must have Him. Nor will it be hard to obtain either; for He longs to enter into thy being. Thy longing is the faint response of thy heart to his call. The power that works within is matched by the grace which can do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. Man never desired so much of God as God desired of man. God's holiness has revealed itself in a human form in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord; and so it is as able as it is eager to enter human lives through that blessed Spirit who is pre-eminently the channel and medium by which we are filled up unto all the fulness of God. Ask thy heavenly Father for this Spirit. He is more eager to give Him than a father to give food to his hungry child. And, having asked, dare to believe that thou hast received, and "go in this thy might" (Judges. 6:14).

And this holiness will reveal itself in many ways.

1. THERE WILL BE THE PILGRIM ATTITUDE AND TEMPER.

Eastern fashions suggest the figure of the flirt loins. There the loose and flowing robes suit well the deliberate movements which the

climate begets; but they would grievously hamper pilgrim, wrestler, or warrior. When the Israelites were momentarily expecting the summons for the Exodus, they stood with their loins girt around the tables on which the paschal lamb was smoking. Thus too did the prophet of fire gird himself for the swift courier-run before Ahab's chariot, from Carmel to Jezreel (1Kings 18:46).

Our souls are clad with the flowing garments of various tastes, appetites, affections, and propensities, which hang loosely around us, constantly, catching in the things of the world, and hindering us in the Christian race. We must not let them stream as they will-- or we do so at our peril. Absalom rued the day when his luxuriant tresses floated behind him in the breeze. We must "gird up" the habits of our souls, make trim ourselves, so as to pass as quickly and easily as possible through the thorny jungle of the world.

Hold your spirit in a tight band. Put a curb on appetite. Say "No" to luxurious pleasure-seeking. Curtail your expenditure on yourself. Do not spread yourself too widely. Watch eye and lip, thought and wish, lest any break from the containing cords of self-control: "Keep thy heart with all diligence." Give Vanity Fair as little chance as possible, by passing swiftly and unostentatiously through.

Be sober!--Sobriety is a great word. It is constantly included in the New Testament on elders, deacons, women, aged men, young men, and maidens. It means temperance, self-control, and a just estimate of one's self in the world. There are some who counterfeit it by assuming an austere and forbidding attitude, denouncing much that is innocent and natural, and looking severely on some who do not yield to their scruples. The truly sober man, on the other hand, moves freely through the world, strewn with beautiful and innocent things: using them without, abuse, rejoicing in every good thing which the Lord God gives; but never allowing any of them to usurp too great an influence on his affections, or to tyrannize over his will.

When the heart is fully engaged with the Lord, his service and love, and rewards, and welcome home at last, it can afford to look undazzled on many a captivating spectacle, and to turn from many a fascinating cup. The holy heart, filled to brimming with the presence of God, is like a man who has been well banqueted, and who is therefore able to look calmly on the passionate heat with which starving men will fight with each other over offal.

Hope to the end--"Set your hope perfectly" (R.V.). Go fearlessly as far as hope can go. Let her sit at her easel, painting her fairest pictures, or sing rapturously her most ecstatic lay: she cannot be disappointed. The "grace which is to be brought unto us" when the veiling clouds are rent, and the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven, will far surpass all her imaginings. Hope is the lamp of the soul, passed down from saint to saint, as in the old Greek race, but destined to be eclipsed in the light which is to break ere long upon our spirits--the day of perfected redemption, of glorified creation, of a perfected church. The Revised Version reminds us that that grace is being brought--it has started, and is already on its way.

2. THERE WILL BE THE OBEDIENCE OF CHILDREN

(1Peter 1:14)

Once the children of disobedience, we have been born again, and become children of obedience--a fair mother with noble offspring. Such, at least, is the literal rendering of the Greek. And what a marvellous difference at once comes over the lives of those who have passed through this change! They "no longer fashion themselves according to the former lusts."

Lust is natural inclination run wild, overleaping all restraint, and asserting its own imperious will. When we are yet in the darkness of nature, unilluminated by the grace of God, these lusts fashion us. Beneath their touch we are moulded or fashioned, as clay by the potter's hand. Ignorant of the abominableness of sin, of its disastrous results, of its insidious growth, we yield to it until it becomes our tyrant and our ruin. Oh, the horror of the awaking, should we see the depths of this beetling precipice descending sheer beneath us to hell! When we no longer fashion ourselves according to the former lusts, but according to the will of God--that is obedience.

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this truth. Obedience is not holiness; holiness is the possession of the soul by God. But holiness always leads to obedience. And each time we obey, we receive into our natures a little more of the Divine nature. "If ye shall indeed obey my voice, ye shall be a holy nation unto Me." Do, then, whatever it is right to do. Forsake all which begins and ends with self. Be not satisfied with prayer and desire, but Do. And thus there will come over your face and life more likeness to the Father of your spirits; and you will be holy.

How few Christian people seem to realize that obedience in trifles, in all things, to the will and law of Jesus, is the indispensable condition of life and joy and power. The obedient soul is the holy soul, penetrated and filled by the presence of God, and all aglow with light and love. Dear reader, resolve from this moment to live up to the margin of your light. Let this be your motto: "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient." Israel said this and failed utterly and shamefully; do you say it by the power of the Holy Spirit, and He shall make it gloriously possible.

3. THERE WILL BE A REVERENT ANTICIPATION OF THE FATHER'S AWARD

(1Peter 1:17).

God's children are to be judged, not at the great white throne, but at the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10). That judgment will not decide our eternal destiny, because that has been settled before; but it will settle the rewards of our faithfulness or otherwise (Matt. 25:19; 1 Cor. 3:14).

There is a sense in which that judgment is already in process, and we are ever standing before the judgment bar. "The Father who judgeth." The Divine verdict is being pronounced perpetually on our actions, and hourly is manifesting itself in light or shadow.

But it is a Father's judgment. We call on Him as Father. Notice this reciprocity of calling. He called us; we call Him; His address to us as children begets our address to Him as Father. We need not dread his scrutiny--it is tender. He pities us as a father pities his children, knowing our frame, allowing for our weaknesses, and bearing with us with an infinite patience.

But for all that it is impartial. "Without respect of persons." Many years before, this had been revealed to the Apostle from heaven in a memorable vision, which affected his whole after-ministry (Acts 10:35). Not according to profession, or appearance, or any self-constituted importance, but according to what we do, are we being judged.

The holy soul realizes this; and a great awe falls upon it and overshadows it--an awe not born of the fear which hath torment, but of love. It passes the time of its sojourning in fear. Not the fear of evil consequences to itself, but the fear of grieving the Father; of bringing a shadow over his face; of missing any manifestation of his love and nearness to Himself, which may be granted to the obedient child. Love casts out fear; but it also begets it. There is nothing craven, or fretful, or depressing; but a tenderness of conscience which dreads the tiniest cloud on the inner sky, such as might overshadow for a single moment the clear shining of the Father's face. So the brief days of sojourning pass quickly on, and the vision of the Homeland beckons to us, and bids us mend our pace.

VIII REDEEMED BY BLOOD

"Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who, verily, was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by Him do believe in God that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God." 1Peter 1:18-21.

We belong to a redeemed race (1Ti 2:6). The majority of men do not know this. Others, knowing it, do not allow their knowledge to influence their life or conduct, but sell their birthright for a mess of pottage. Happy are they who not only hold the fact of redemption as an intellectual acquisition, but permit it to become the moulding principle of their entire life. To such the words of the Apostle come with marvellous directness and force "Ye know that ye were redeemed."

Probably the most momentous truth about us is--that we have been redeemed It is much to have been created--called into being by the distinct fiat of the Creator's will. It is much to be endowed with life in a world so full of marvellous possibilities as ours. It is much to have a soul, which can call up the past, or interrogate the present, or anticipate and prepare for the future. But it is more that we have been redeemed. Redeemed, as Israel from the bondage and tyranny of Egypt; or as a slave, by his "Goel"--his kinsman-redeemer--from captivity to some rich creditor; or as the captive of some hideous vice emancipated from its thrall. Redeemed! Bought! Ransomed! Not that heaven is bought for us, but we bought for heaven. This will perhaps distinguish us for evermore among all other created intelligences.

1. THE COST OF OUR REDEMPTION HAS BEEN IMMENSE.

(1) Negatively.--"Not with corruptible things, as silver and gold."

A moneyed man, who has been accustomed to look on his wealth as the key to every treasure-chest is sometimes startled to find how little it can really do. It touches the rim and circumference of life; but it fails utterly in questions that affect the heart of human existence. Money cannot compensate for broken vows; or unsay cruel words which eat into the soul like acid; or bring back colour to the pallid cheek of the darling, cold and still in death; or atone for the lack of love. "If a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be contemned." Money can only purchase things which are as corruptible as itself; but when it enters or seeks to enter into the sphere of souls, the eternal and incorruptible, its way is barred; its currency will not pass; its claims to be heard are nonsuited.

You cannot dissect an argument with a knife, or measure love by the yard measure, or weigh souls by avoirdupois. And it is equally impossible to ransom them from sin by "corruptible things, as silver and gold." There is nothing in common between the gold and silver, which, however long they endure, must perish in the end, and the soul, which is of ethereal temper, impervious to destruction

and decay, and destined to survive the crash of matter and the wreck of worlds.

God could have given suns of gold, and stars of silver, constellations glowing with precious metals; but none of these would have been sufficient to free one soul from the curse or penalty of sin, or to change it into a loyal and loving subject of his reign. Though the scales of the universe groaned on the one side with the heaped treasures of heaven, the jewels of its walls, the gold of its pavements--yet one soul placed on the other would outweigh them all. Matter accounts for nothing in the weighing-chamber of eternity. And therefore the Creator must give not things, but life--not his gifts, but Himself--ere He could redeem.

(2) POSITIVELY.--"But with the precious blood of Christ."

The blood is the life of all flesh. Life is man's supreme possession, and God's supreme gift. To give up anything less than life is to fall short of the completest self-sacrifice for another. But when a man has given that, he has given all he can. And, in addition, when blood is mentioned with the laying down of life, there is the further thought of suddenness, of intense suffering, of violence; yea, more, no one familiar with Leviticus, and with that whole system in which the Apostle Peter was educated from boyhood, could ever encounter such a reference as this without being instantly reminded of that sacrificial system, in which lambs were offered up day by day for the sins of the people.

When the Apostle speaks of being redeemed by the blood of Christ, "as of a lamb without blemish and without spot," he not only refers to the agony, and violence, and circumstances of his death, but gives renewed utterance to that first conception about the Lord which had fallen upon his ear from the lips of the great forerunner, whose disciple he had been in the earliest days of his religious history (John 1:35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42). And there can be no doubt that he desires clearly to connect the sufferer of Calvary with the lambs daily offered in the morning and evening Temple worship; with those slain at the great annual feast of Passover; and with others, whose blood was constantly flowing to make an atonement for sin and sins.

In considering the number of lambs sacrificed in the Jewish temple, we must always remember that a large proportion of their flesh was eaten, whether by the priests or the offerers; and that every method was adopted to keep the sacred structure pure, and sweet, and clean. And when we once admit that it is the office of the lower orders of creation to subserve the necessary interests of man, there is not much difference between their dying to set forth in type great spiritual truths, which are the life of the soul, or to provide suitable nutriment for the sustenance of the body. But, let me repeat, in the Jewish sacrifices these two objects were most frequently combined.

It is most important to give due weight to the suggestion of this passage, which is corroborated by many similar ones throughout the Bible, that the death of Christ was no afterthought consequent on man's fall, but was determined before the foundation of the world. Before the mountains were brought forth, or the stars were rolled on their wondrous paths, or the first ray of light shot through the gloom, in the thought and purpose of God, our Lord was already the Lamb slain. "He was foreordained (designated or set apart) from before the foundation of the world" (1Peter 1:20; Rev. 13:8).

And so the sacrifices of the Jewish ritual were in fact "the copies of things in the heavens." When Moses went up into the Mount, it is probable that he was permitted to behold the Divine purpose and plan of man's redemption; which, as it passed before his thought, took shape in that symbolism of priest, and sacrifice, and rite, which was God's method of tuition to the chosen people, affording a rudimentary and material outline of eternal realities.

We must not think that Calvary was moulded on Leviticus, but that Leviticus was moulded on Calvary, as it stood out from all eternity before the mind of God. Yet it is unmistakeable that Leviticus furnishes the true key to the understanding of the death of the cross. In those earlier books the Holy Spirit supplies us with the nomenclature and terms which He was afterwards going to employ. And just as it would be absurd to try to understand the deductions of Euclid, without first studying his definitions, so it is in vain to attempt the solution of the marvels of the cross, without entering into the force and meaning of the rites and sacrifices of the ancient Hebrew system.

Now, if there is one thing more clear than another in the Levitical sacrifices, it is the substitution of the innocent for the guilty; and it is under this aspect that we must consider the death of our Redeemer. It is in this sense that He gave Himself for us. And this is the reason why the Apostle lays such emphasis on the preciousness of the sacrifice. Anything less than the costliest blood would not have availed; because it must not be simply the blood of an individual sufferer, but of One who could suffer for a race of sinners.

The blood of Christ was precious, because of the dignity of his nature, and because of his perfect character. "Without blemish"--that is, without personal sin. "Without spot"--that is, not defiled by contact with sinners (1Peter 1:19). Lamblike in meekness, gentleness, purity, and uncomplaining suffering. And thus it was adequate for the work of cleansing away the terrible aggregate of sin. Oh, precious blood! Oh, sacred heart of Jesus, from which it flowed, holy, loving, tender, broken with grief! Oh, snowy whiteness of robes washed in that fountain, and purer than the snow!

2. THE OBJECT OF OUR REDEMPTION

"From your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers." Do we sufficiently realize the position into which the shedding of the blood of Jesus has brought us who believe? It is our ransom price, the purchase-money of our entire being to be Christ's. The Apostles lived in the days of a merciless form of slavery; but they never hesitated to borrow from it the imagery by which to set forth our relationship to our Saviour. "Not your own, but bought with a price." "Denying the Lord who bought them" (1Cor. 6:19, 20; 7:23; 2Pe 2:1).

The purchaser of any slave regarded him as his chattel, his goods. He could, if he chose, fling him to feed his lampreys, and none might remonstrate or punish. He looked on all his belongings, and earnings, and talents, as so much emolument for himself. His word and will were absolute law. Such are the rights which our glorious Master has over us. He has redeemed us from the curse and penalty of sin to be a people for possession--HIS VERY OWN.

Who then of us can live as we have been wont, following after vanity, treading in the footsteps of our forefathers, content to do as others before us? New claims have come in. Our Redeemer is Lord. As He has set us free from the curse and penalty of sin, so now He demands of us to come out and be separate for Himself; leaving the husks for bread; the bubble for the substance; the vain conversation received by tradition, for purity, holiness, and devotion to Himself.

What a marvellous exchange there is for us in Jesus Christ! Our "vain manner of life" (n.y.) exchanged for "holiness in all manner of living" (1Peter 1:15, R.V.); our imitation of our "fathers" for the upward following of Him who was raised from the dead to glory; our reliance on "tradition" for vital contact with Christ Himself.

Have you assumed this attitude? If not, without delay confess with tears that you have robbed your rightful Master; recognize his claims; give up yourself entirely to his service; and let the time past more than "suffice" you to have followed the tradition of the fathers, with their vanities and sins. The blood of Jesus, like that of Asahel shed on the pathway of the warriors, shall make us halt in our career, and turn us to a better mind.

3. THE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE REDEEMED

"Who by Him do believe in God." Our faith and hope, which at the beginning of our Christian life are mainly occupied with Christ, so that we find ourselves most often addressing Him in prayer, pass through Him, who is God, to the Eternal God. The Son reveals the Father as He promised (John 14:7-9)-The Father is known and loved through the Son. God becomes All in all; and the soul is satisfied to repose its entire weight on Him who has raised and glorified our Blessed Lord.

It becomes us to ponder well this important passage, attesting as it does a momentous truth. Let us not forget that the true and ultimate object of our faith must be the God of the Resurrection; the Father of our Lord; Jehovah, in whom the elders believed. And let it be also borne in mind that one primary object of the wondrous revelation of the Father in the person and work of Jesus has been to make it a little more easy for our trembling and sin-stricken souls to believe in Him. "He raised Him up and gave Him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God."

IX. CHRISTIAN LOVE

"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." 1Peter 1:22-23.

WE love the Lord whom we have not seen (1Peter 1:8). We must also love our brethren whom we have seen. The latter indeed is the test of the former. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?" (1John 4:20). "See that ye love one another."

But such love is not an easy thing. We are inclined to read such an exhortation as this, and go our way, saying, "Oh yes, this is all we need do. We must love every one, and especially those who belong to the same Christian church as ourselves--our brethren." And what is the love to which we set ourselves? Is it not too often an easy sentimentality? To give things away: to indulge every wish and whim: to make things easy and pleasant all round: to wear a gracious smile--this is too often the life which we propose to ourselves, as the carrying out of the precepts of universal love. And for some temperaments this is the easiest life possible. They are naturally affable, pleasant, genial, and generous. But does this fulfil the repeated injunction of the New Testament, that we should love one another "as Christ has loved us"? For, after all, there is often a species of refined selfishness in our apparent courtesy, which desires to stand well with all, or shrinks from taking too much trouble.

What is that love of which our Lord and his Apostles speak? Not only, or primarily, kind feelings, or generous impulses. Not

certainly the sentimentality which breathes itself out in sighs and raptures. Not merely the fond attachment which clings as the rose against the trellis. But, above all things, service--ministry--self-denial and self-giving. To put another's well-being before our own--not because it is pleasant to do it, but because it is right. To make another the pivot around which the wheel of activity revolves. To give oneself to death a hundred times a day in unobtrusive, trifling acts of self-denial. To check the hasty word, the unkind speech, the damaging criticism. To vacate a comfortable seat in a railway carriage for the sake of the love of God. To lead a little child home, when lost in the street, or in an agony of terror from a thunder-storm, to win the "inasmuch." To show to the inmates of one's home, in the most trifling incidents, the same behaviour as is prompted in men of the world by mere politeness; and to do it for the sake of Jesus. All these things are traits of a love which has no native origin in human hearts, but emanates from the being of God, descending into the hearts of his own, and passing back through them to Him again. And this is what God asks of us. Let us examine the marks of such love; its efficient cause; its Divine origin. And may the Holy Spirit, whose first fruit is "love" (Gal. 5:22), shed it abroad abundantly within our hearts.

1. THE MARKS OF SUCH LOVE.

(1) Unfeigned.--Dissimulation is a disease very antagonistic to Christian love. More than once we are warned against it in the Apostolic writings (Ro 12:9; 2Cor. 6:6). We are all tempted to profess more than we feel; to kiss those whom we are betraying; to cover with soft words crevasses which are yawning deeper every day. How much more effusive we are to our friends than our thoughts of them sometimes warrant! How often we are one thing to their face and another to their back! How subtly we are tempted to maintain appearances, because of some ulterior gain!

Our politeness is often but skin-deep. (Ed: Convicted? I am!) Our smiles assumed for a purpose. Our words smoother than butter, whilst our hearts are drawn swords. Our acceptance of apologies, as superficial as Joseph's brethren thought that his would prove to be after old Jacob's death. Our love is not altogether "unfeigned."

(2) Pure.--"Hearts may be cemented by impurity, by ungodly conversation and society in sin, as in uncleanness or drunkenness. The mutual love of Christians must be pure, from such causes as are pure and spiritual, arising out of the Saviour's command or example." The eye of the heart must be single; its habit stainless; its motives "white as the light." There must be no thought or suspicion of the passions of the flesh, which lie so near to the springs of intense spirituality in men and women. The love of the world so often ends in lust; lofty ideals are shattered; cloudless mornings become overcast. And our temptation lies in the same direction. It is a mistake to think that, because we meet in religious assemblies, and talk of hymns, and sermons, and sacred themes, there is no danger of the taint of impurity destroying the delicate sensitive bloom of our spirits. Too often our love is not pure.

(3) Fervently.--"On the stretch." Not with the loose string of the unstrung bow, but with the tension of the strings of the violin drawn out to their full. This is a model which almost seems to mock us. It is so much easier to be on the stretch for ourselves than to seek the good of others with the same eager energy. Our love seldom gets beyond "temperate," and never to boiling point. We have not learnt the secret of the heart bubbling over. We are not fervent in our love. We do not weep over our brethren's faults; or rejoice in their success as much as in our own; or love them with a passion which should act as an alembic for the evil that is in them.

It was the Master's last prayer that we should love like this. He meant that we should put off anger, wrath, malice, and evil speaking; and that we should put on bowels of mercies, kindness, longsuffering, and forbearance. So would the world believe (John 17:21).

2. THE EFFICIENT CAUSE OF SUCH LOVE.

It will come through "obeying the truth." This is very marvellous. We should have thought that our love to each other would have been promoted best by meeting for social enjoyment, by knowing each other better, by constant association in Christian work. But this is not God's way. The true lens by which hearts are made to glow is the Truth.

We must know the truth.--Put two burnished mirrors opposite each other, and there will be no glow of light on either; but if a candle stand between, the beams of light are flung to and fro, to an extent impossible to either or both alone. So the mere contact of Christian with Christian will not necessarily produce the burning heart, unless there be also between them the Truth of God.

Study the lives of the saintliest men; and you will find it to have been their invariable experience, that their love to God and men grew in the precise proportion in which they explored the treasures of Divine truth. It was when their intellects were most engaged in discovering the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, that their hearts seemed in a rapture of irrepressible and inexpressible ecstasy. "Did not our heart burn within us while He opened to us the Scriptures?"

We must also obey the truth.--Do, and you shall know. Obey, and you will love. Some try to promote love by the use of endearing epithets; or by the endless repetition of experience; or by reading rapturous expressions, like those which were so natural to a Bernard or a Rutherford. But such endeavours will soon wear themselves out.

A thousand times better shall we find it to set ourselves to "obey the truth." Let no command be unfulfilled in some dusty corner of the soul. Let no margin intervene between your feet and the limit of your light. Let the life follow the Divine Word as closely as the great Lawgiver followed the cloud sailing majestically through the heavens. Translate all precepts into the vernacular of daily duty; and you will verify, in a yet deeper sense than ever, the Master's words:

"He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me" (John 14:21)

As we obey the truth, we shall be purified by it.--Young men cleanse their way by taking heed thereto according to the Divine Word. The Bridegroom purifies his bride by the washing of water through the Word. Oh, all ye who groan under the sense of a defiled heart--here is one secret of cleanliness, Obey the truth!

Many will read these lines who are athirst for purity and love. Innocence can never be theirs--the innocence that consists in ignorance of evil and unconsciousness of temptation. But they desire that purity which passes through evil untainted, as sunbeams through a fetid atmosphere, and for that love which floods cannot drown, like the old Greek fire which burnt under water.

The atheist does not think that these things are possible. He has no hope in God, and no belief in man. He looks darkly on all profession, and sadly suspects every motive. Oh, do not let your high hopes be dashed or your ambitions lowered by his suggestions.

**Undaunted, still seek for the holy grail of a pure and burning heart.
It shall certainly reward your search at last.**

There is no need to seek this blessed gift in the wilderness, like St. Anthony; on the pillar, like Simon Stylites; in the recesses of the forest, like Gaudama. "The word is nigh thee, in thy mouth and in thy heart" (Ro 10:8). Purify your heart in obeying the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren.

Nor will it be difficult to understand how it is that so simple a method will achieve so great a result, when we have given the next consideration its true weight.

3. THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF THE LIFE WITHIN.

"Having been begotten again" (1Peter 1:23, R.V.).

Our spiritual life is "not of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:13).

We have been twice born. Born once by nature into the stock of the first Adam; and born a second time by grace into the stock of the second Adam, the Lord from heaven.

"Of his own will God begat us by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures" (Jas 1:18).

One chief evidence of this life is simple trust in the Saviour. As many as believe in his name were born (John 1:13).

And the life that has been implanted within us is like the inheritance which awaits us (1Peter 1:4) and the blood which purchased us (1Peter 1:18)--**INCORRUPTIBLE.**

It cannot, therefore, be limited by the narrow landmarks of time, or sense, or this fleeting world. It overleaps and clerics them all. It partakes of the nature of the Infinite and Eternal. Thus it follows that the piety it affects is of celestial temper, and the love it manifests is the true unfeigned love of Deity. The best guarantee of the permanence and reality of Christian Purity and Love is to look at the life from which they emanate, and which is implanted by the second birth--a life which in turn is best considered in the seed from which it has come, and by which it has been communicated to the believer's heart.

That **seed** is here contrasted with the outward life of men. All flesh is as grass: men and women pass away as the successive crops on the meadows. And the glory of man as the flower of grass. The king-cups and daisies share the fate of the lowly blades around them, emblems of the impotence of wealth or strength or beauty to resist the ravages of the sickle of Time. But in contrast to this stands out the eternal Truth of God, which is enshrined in the holy words of God.

It is **LIVING** and life-giving. It remaineth and "**abideth for ever.**"

That the Bible is amongst us to-day--in spite of all that has been done to destroy it, by fire, and search, and sword--attests the fact that there are properties in it which divide it by an impassable chasm from all books beside. It is clearly true of all Scripture words, that they "are spirit and life," and can never pass away; and that not one jot or tittle shall fail. And this fact that the Bible lives and abides, notwithstanding all that has been done against it, proves that it possesses something of the life of the eternal and infinite God. God is manifestly in this Book, as of old in the acacia bush of the desert; or as natural life burns like a tiny spark within each

seed falling down the bank. The persistence of the Book proves God to be in it. And therefore it is God's life which enters dead human souls through the Word and makes them live. The life which is thus begotten in them is infinite and eternal as Himself. And, being so, it lifts its possessors above the time-sphere into the very realm of heaven, and enables them to love, not with the poor faltering love of man, but with the royal, pure, unfeigned, blessed love, which is the very soul of the life of God Himself.

X. GOD'S NEW BORN BABES AND THEIR FOOD

"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word. that ye may grow thereby; if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."--1Peter 2:1-3.

This paragraph is closely connected with the preceding one. In that we learnt how we had been born again, and entered by the new birth into the family of God. Here the same thought is resumed. We are addressed as the babes of the Divine family, and bidden to cultivate the temper and seek the nourishment suitable to a relationship at once so blessed and hallowed.

1. OUR CONDITION AS GOD'S LITTLE ONES.

"New-born babes."

The metaphor is a very touching one. This world is but the nursery in which the heirs of God are spending the first lisping years of their existence, preparatory to the opening of life to full maturity yonder in the light of God. The most advanced among us, in knowledge and attainment, are, in comparison with what they shall be, only as babes. The furthest stretch of vision, the most perfect conceptions of the intellect, the fittest expressions of truth, are but as the untutored thoughts and babblings of babyhood, compared with what is to be in the mature life which beckons us yonder.

The same idea is expressed by the Apostle Paul in his exquisite idyll on Christian love. He is endeavouring to show that this fairest of the whole band of Christian graces is eternal in its nature, budding here, defying the frosts of death, and blooming in heaven's everlasting summer. And, to make his conception more emphatic, he contrasts love with knowledge, affirming that our profoundest knowledge must vanish away, because in this life we are but children. "When I was a child I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things." And, similarly, in the next life, while we retain the love which we have had in this, we shall put away the knowledge as partial and immature, because from being children we shall have become men in Christ. We need not concern ourselves now with all the majestic conceptions which cluster around those words: it is enough to notice the thought, that the Apostle Paul considered himself a little child, compared with the coming maturity of eternity.

This word should teach us Humility. "Our best pace and strongest walking in obedience here is but as the stepping of children when they begin to go by hold, in comparison with the perfect obedience of glory, when we shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. All our knowledge here is but as the ignorance of infants, and all our expressions of God and of his praises but as the first stammerings of children, in comparison with the knowledge we shall have of Him hereafter, when we shall know as we are known, and with the praises we shall offer to Him, when that "new song" shall be taught us." It becomes us, therefore, not to exercise ourselves in great matters, or in things too high for us, but to quiet ourselves as a child that is weaned of its mother, so that our souls may be even as a weaned child. Not surprised, if unnoticed or unknown; not angry, if treated with small respect; not discouraged, if face to face with incomprehensible mysteries. Our intellect is only in its dawn, our powers undeveloped, our mental grasp limited. Far be from us the haughty heart, the proud look, the conceited opinion, the sweeping assertion of self-satisfaction. Ours is the lisp of infancy: "Abba."

This word should also teach us Hope. There is no young thing so helpless as a babe, or for so long dependent on its parents' care. But He who has appointed the long months of babyhood has also provided the love and patience with which mother and father welcome and tend the strange wee thing which has come into their home. It is not often that a woman can forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on her son. Through ailments and sicknesses, days of anxiety, and nights of watching; with love which never considers cost, or pain, or self-denial - two fond guardian angels care for the babe. Its least cry will compel the service of a man dreaded by all his comrades, and noted for the strength and independence of his character. And shall God have put into others qualities in which He is Himself deficient? Shall He have provided so carefully for us in our first birth, and have provided nought in our second? Is not the very love of the human parent a parable of that of the Divine? Is He not Mother and Father both?

It must be so. Since He has begotten us into his family, He must have to us the love of a parent to a babe; and we must have a claim on Him, as the babe on its parent. The more utterly helpless, and ignorant, and dependent the babe is, the stronger is its claim. Yes, and the more puny and sickly it is, the more urgent are its demands for tender solicitude and attention, till the spark of life, shaded by loving hands from the least unkindly breath, grows strong within the tiny lantern. Who is angry with a child because it is

weakly, sick, and dull of brain? Who does not find in these things the reason for greater tenderness, so that mothers are said to love most the children who have cost them most? And is it not so with God? Your weakness, and ailments, and nervous dread, and besetting sins, and hereditary taint of evil habit, and dullness of vision, will not drive God from you, but will bring Him nearer. These things will draw down his choicest love to your poor-cradled being. He will sit beside you as a nurse. He will watch your every change. He will care for you with unslumbering thoughtfulness. He will supply your every need. He will make you know things hidden from the wise and prudent, but revealed to babes, in words which even they can understand. He will never leave you until you are reared to the perfect beauty of maturity in Christ.

This word should also teach us our true attitude towards God Throw yourself on Him with the abandonment of a babe. Roll on Him the responsibility of choosing for you--directing, protecting, and delivering you. If you cannot understand his will, expect Him to make it plain. If you cannot feel as you would, believe that his feeling towards you is unalterable as a father's. If you are overcome by sin, be sure that it cannot alienate his love, any more than can the small-pox, which has marred some dear tiny face, prevent the mother from kissing the little parched lips. Oh, strong men and women, never get so strong as to cease to remember that you are the babes of God, and that you may carry out this winsome similitude to the full! Listen to his declaration: "I have nourished and brought up children."

2. OUR FOOD.

"Long for the spiritual milk which is without guile" (R.V.).

At the close of the previous chapter the Word of God was compared with seed; here, with milk. But it is the same principle under different aspects. The new life is nourished by that through which it was first imparted. There are deep analogies between the worlds of nature and of grace, attesting the unity of design which pervades the universe, making the seen and the unseen one great whole.

There is nothing which so prove the inspiration of the Scriptures as their suitability to the nurture of the new life in the soul. As long as that life is absent, there is no special charm in the sacred Word: it lies unnoticed on the shelf. But directly the new life has been implanted, and whilst yet in its earliest stages, it seeks after the Word of God as a babe after its mother's milk; and instantly it begins to grow. This affinity between the Divine life in the soul and the sacred Scriptures establishes their emanation from the same source as gave it birth. Human life in infancy is most naturally nourished by the products of the life from which it originated; and since the Divine life in man is nourished by the words of the Bible, surely it also is proved to be Divine in its origin, supernatural in its qualities, heavenly in its temper --as far removed from the earthly and human as is the life to which it ministers.

Oh, well would it be if we were to minister to the regenerated spirits around us more of the pure and unadulterated Word of God! It is this which they really need. They may be attracted and pleased for a time by flowers of rhetoric and the dazzling glow of eloquence; but they will not be satisfied by these things. Underneath all there will be a great hunger for the sincere milk of the Word. And when that word is presented in all its fulness and simplicity, eager appetites will gather around, as bees attracted by the flower-gardens, or the fragrant breath of the heather. "Before conversion, wit or eloquence may draw a man to the Word, and possibly prove a happy bait to catch him; but when once he is born again then it is the milk itself that he desires."

And here surely we are taught the reason why so many Christians around us are so puny and stunted in their growth. They are always needing attention, nursing, wheeling about in perambulators, because their teachers have not provided them with the nutriment which they really need. As unsuitable food, however abundant, will soon tell its own tale on the pinched face of a babe, so the sickly condition of so many Christians sets forth a lamentable complaint of the food with which they are supplied. To say nothing of strong meat, they do not even get milk. Hence the Church of God too much resembles the wards of a children's hospital.

3. HOW TO CREATE AN APPETITE FOR THE WORD.

"**Desire.**" One of the most dangerous symptoms is the loss of appetite. It is the danger-signal warning that evil lurks unseen within. And there is no surer indication of religious declension and ill-health than the cessation of desire for the Word of God. How can that appetite be created where lacking, and stimulated where declining? The answer is given in the context.

(1) Put off the evil that clings to you.--The word translated "putting away" is the same as in Col. 3:8. The idea is the change of dress which is often used as a Scriptural figure for the change of the habit of the soul. The habiliments which we must doff are enumerated, and a terrible catalogue it is. Alas that it should ever have been necessary, or that it should still be, to urge Christians to surrender such obvious evils as these!

Malice, which is anger cooled down into "double-distilled malignity," rejoicing in the misfortunes which come to others. Guile, which savours of trick and craft. Hypocrisy, the Judas-act of concealing treachery beneath the garb of friendship. Envy, which repines at

another's good. Both malice and envy vent themselves in evil speaking, These things spoil the appetite for God's Word, as surely as sweetmeats clog the physical appetite and taste. Many cannot enjoy the Word of God, because their minds are so occupied with these poisoned dainties, or with the sugar-coated sweetmeats of exciting or questionable literature, of worldly amusements, and of evil imaginings. These things must be at once and for ever put away. You must elect the cross. There must be a casting aside of the shameful works of darkness, so only can the appetite for God's Word become vigorous and eager. Clear away the rubbish, and the spring will burst up naturally from the ground.

(2) Remember that your growth depends on your feeding on the Word.-Who is there amongst us that is not anxious to grow; to become more Christlike, and holy, and devoted; to increase in knowledge and in grace? But we appear often to imagine that we shall grow by attending meetings or doing Christian work. It is a disastrous mistake. And until we come to see that growth is proportionate to Bible-study, it will be impossible to rise up to the perfect beauty of the stature of Christ. We shall always be children, carried about by every wind of doctrine.

Do not always read your Bible because you like to do so, or desire it, but because it is right to do it, and as a matter of simple duty to your own life. Study the Word under the light of the Holy Spirit, as the ancient saint, when blindness was setting in, was wont to carry his Bible to the window, and place the open page in the full beams of the western sun. And slowly the appetite will re-assert itself, and you will come to esteem the Word of God more than your necessary food.

(3) Stimulate your desire by the memory of past enjoyment.-"If so be that ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." We seek food, not only because our body requires it, but because we remember the past sweetness of it to our taste. We often take more than is necessary to appease hunger, because the food is toothsome.

How sweet to the taste is the precious Lord!For none among the sons and daughters of men can be compared to Him. His love has sometimes filled our souls with inexpressible delight and bliss--grapes of Eshcol, prelibations of the river of life, branches laden with fruit reaching over the wall. And those who have once tasted of that love have contracted a passion which grows in being fed. Because they have tasted they must come again and again to stay an appetite which, though always being met, is always on the increase.

Do you not remember days like these, of feasting and song, when you were led into his banqueting-house, or sat under his shadow with great delight? If so, surely the memory of them will sharpen the jaded desire, until it cries with the spouse: "Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples; for I am sick of love." Ah, how vapid and insipid do the joys of the world appear when once the soul has tasted that the Lord is gracious. "Taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him."