

Tried by Fire by F B Meyer-3

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
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XXII. THE BREATH OF ETERNITY

"For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: who shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead. For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit. But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."--1 Peter 4:3-7.

THERE is a great contrast between the believers of the Apostolic age and ourselves. And this contrast is shown, not so much in the truths held and believed, or in devotion towards the Lord Jesus, as in the different attitude taken up and maintained towards the great future.

With them eternity had already begun. It dated from the moment in which they received Christ into their hearts. The fact of their being in the body did not obscure their perception of the union subsisting between them and their risen Lord, so close and intimate that where He was there they also were. His death had cut them also off from the world which had crucified Him. His grave lay as an impassable barrier between them and the course of human society, which had refused and rejected Him. In his resurrection and ascension they had participated. Where their treasure was, there their hearts were also. In Him they had already become denizens and citizens of the world where He was King, sitting in the Heavens. True, they had their dwelling in the world to do their necessary business according to the will of God, to learn lessons that could only be learnt under the conditions of our present mortal life, and to act as an antiseptic to the evil around. But this was compatible with their dwelling in spirit in their true home and rest, confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

The voyager detects the near proximity of land by the fresh land-breeze which breathes in his face, wafting the sounds and scents of forest, or prairie, or heather-covered hill. So, through these Epistles, we inhale another atmosphere than that with which we are so familiar in modern Christian societies. We live in the world and pay occasional visits into the unseen and eternal; those early Christians lived in the unseen and eternal, and paid periodic necessary visits into the world. We conform to the world; they were transformed by the daily renewing of their minds. We read the society papers, discuss society gossip send our children into society, and strive to hold our own in dress and appointments with the cream of society around us; they, on the other hand, were thought strange and ridiculous, because they lived amongst men as "the children of the resurrection." Surely the contrast is not to our credit, although we vaunt our fancied superiority.

There are many symptoms of this state of mind in the passage before us. The limited time or duration of our life as contrasted with the infinite stretch of future existence; the reference to Him who is ready to judge, as if the great white throne were already erected in mid-heaven, and men were being arraigned before it, preparatory to the solemn session of the Judge; the piercing cry as of the last herald angel, that the end of all things is at hand--all these indicate the mood of the Apostle's soul. He stood in the light of eternity. Its breath was upon his face. Its spirit was in his heart. And it was under the deep impression of these momentous realities that he exhorted those whom he addressed, as pilgrims and strangers, to abstain from fleshly lusts. And what stronger motive could he have employed?

1. A BLACK ENUMERATION

"Lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries."

It is a dark picture, reminding us of 1 Cor. 6:9-11. But it is a faithful delineation of the state of the world, in spite of the loftiest

teachings of philosophy and morals. Ordinary readers can form but a very inadequate conception of the gross evils before which the ancient world was simply rotting away at the time of the Advent. The extent of the evil is veiled by the dead languages which contain the record for all time. Suffice it to say that the dialogues of Plato, containing some of the noblest speculations of heathendom, are disgraced by the unblushing discussion and approval of sins which are condemned by the police-courts of every nation in Christendom. There is, therefore, abundant corroboration of this inspired picture of the state of the society of that day. And perhaps its very vileness had a salutary effect upon the Christians of that age, in compelling them to come out and be separate. The curse of our time is that Satan has counterfeited so much of Christianity, and has sought to hide a Godless civilization under the veneer of Christian terms.

We need not dwell on the various evils enumerated, except to note how closely excess of wine is connected with abominable idolatries; and to ask whether any use of wine is not excessive, unless it be taken for some very distinct purpose of health, prescribed by medical authority--and, even then, often mistakenly. We desire rather to call attention to the strong phraseology employed to describe these sins, when the Apostle calls them, as the Greek word indicates, "stagnant pools of havoc-making sin."

Men are tormented by thirst. That thirst was meant to bring them to the river of water of life, which flows from the throne of God. But as they refuse to follow it thither, they are given up to follow it to the brackish stagnant pools of the desert, at which the very beasts would refuse to drink. The music-hall, the gambling den, the casino, the public-house, the abode of shame, are so many foetid pools, at which men seek to quench a thirst which can be slaked with nothing short of the living God. Oh, when will they learn their fatal error! How shall they be warned! Can we not get one draught of throne-water into their tortured throats, to give them an abhorrence of all other beverage beside! "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters."

And as to havoc! What a tale is being told by every newspaper of the havoc being wrought in the votaries of sin. Havoc in estate, fortune, health, happiness, reputation, and usefulness. Wretched bodies, beneath whose weight of corruption the spirit seems almost to have expired. Wretched lives, like the frigate which so gaily leaves the harbour to-day, but is torn by the jagged fang of the rock to-morrow, and goes down in deep water. Wretched souls, without God, or hope, or love, or any trace of their high origin and Divine equipment. Well may the Lamb of God still wear the guise of the Sufferer, in the midst of the throne of God, while sin still works such havoc among a race which He loves more than Himself.

Men of the world think it strange that we do not run with them to the same excess of riot. They know what we renounce, but not what we receive. They see us flinging' away the rank water from the stinking bottle-skins, but they do not see us drinking down long draughts of everlasting life. They cannot understand that what we have in Christ makes all things else taste insipid and forbidding. If they only knew, they would see that THEY are acting strangely, and not we. For, as we see what they miss, and how hard their service is, and how many bitters mingle with their sweets, we often think it strange that they prefer husks to bread, paste diamonds to jewels, and Marah to Elim.

Any time spent in the lusts of the flesh is too long. The time past may well suffice. Oh the bitter regrets which the memory of past sins breeds in the saved soul! What would it not give to be able to obliterate the record, and to look back on an unsullied page! But this may not be. Our only comfort is that He who says that the time for watching is over, also says that there is yet opportunity to retrieve the past, and promises to restore the years which the cankerworm and caterpillar have eaten.

2. AN ARRESTING CONSIDERATION

"Who shall give account to Him that is ready to judge the quick (i.e., the living) and the dead."

It is related of Latimer that, when summoned to take his last trial before vindictive foes, he was somewhat loose and careless in his replies, till, in a pause, he caught the sound of a pen behind the arras, transcribing every word he spoke; and immediately he began to weigh his words with minute and exacting care. Thus we are urged to withdraw ourselves from the ways of those who speak evil of us and blaspheme God, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present evil world, because the Judge standeth at the door.

There is a sense, in which, of course, the judgment awaits men on the other side of death --the judgment seat of Christ for his servants, to adjust their rewards, and the final judgment for the unsaved and ungodly, into which we who are one with Him can never come; but it is also true that we are now in the presence of our Judge. He is ready; He is at the door. The time is come that judgment must begin; and it begins at the house of God.

"Soldiers," said Napoleon to his army, as it passed under the shadow of the pyramids, "forty centuries look down upon you." But if there be an inspiration to valour in the thought of the venerable past, surely there must be a stimulus to holy living in the thought that all our life is naked and opened to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do, whose decisions are even now beginning to register themselves in our history.

From the living the Apostle turns to the dead, to those who had died lately as sufferers and martyrs in the persecutions, which were

already beginning to thin the ranks of the Church. He grants, without hesitation, that they had been adjudged to suffer as much as human nature could, and as if they had been the greatest sinners among their fellows. But after all, it was only "according to men," and "in the flesh"; and from their sufferings he passes to their great reward, and sums it up in saying, they live according to God in the spirit." Against the agonies and tears and adverse judgment of their age, through which the martyr host was called to pass, we must ever set the glories of their reward, as they live in the front ranks of the redeemed, and sun themselves in the light of God's face. And if we are called to share their fate "according to the flesh," let us cheer our hearts by remembering that we shall also share their life "according to God in the spirit," in that world where human judgments are passed under the scrutiny of eternity, and human verdicts are liable to be reversed, with no option of appeal.

How tender the thought of eternity makes us of other men! Would that it were graven on our hearts, as on the pavement before Robert Annan's door, that we might bear their rebuffs, and testify against their sins, as those who are already treading the streets of the Holy City, and are carrying in their hearts the music of the everlasting song.

3. A CLARION CALL

"The end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer."

The end of the Jewish State was impending. The throes of dissolution were already being felt. Soon the venerated system in the heart of which the Church had been nurtured was to split, as the shell of the acorn bursts before the opening of life.

The end of the age of prophets and kings; of a material city of God; of the rites and ceremonies of a typical religion--had come. There was anguish and foreboding in pious hearts as they saw the destruction of a system in which they had been wont to shelter. The birds are scared when they see the tree where many generations have had their nests, swaying to its fall beneath the woodman's axe. The air is full of dust and pothos as the scaffolding is taken down, which has come by long usage to be considered part of the true temple, though in reality it obscures its proportions and beauty. But the Apostles were able to look on without dismay, knowing that the things which were being shaken and removed were only the things which were made, and that they were being put out of the way of those things which cannot be shaken and shall remain.

The time in which we are living is remarkably similar. This also is the end of the age. "The old order changeth, giving place to new." God is beginning to wrap it together as a worn-out vesture. Institutions, expressions, long-cherished methods--are being put into the crucible; with the sure result that only the transient and material shall be dissolved, and there shall emerge the new heavens and earth in which dwelleth righteousness.

Our duty in this crisis is twofold:

(1) Be sober.--Let there be a noble self-restraint in respect to even lawful appetite, and in the use of all the acquisitions and possessions of life. Let the flowing habits, the vestments of the soul, be girt up around the loins. Let there be no entanglement on the part of Christ's soldiers in the affairs of this life, that we may please Him who has chosen us to be his soldiers, and that we may be ready to be up and away whenever the trumpet shall ring out the summons for the exodus, or the voice shall be heard proclaiming the Bridegroom's advent.

(2) Watch unto prayer.--The Lord depicts the faithful servant on the watch for his master's coming, though the long hours of the night have begun to yield to the summons of the dawn, and all around him his fellow-servants are wrapped in slumber.

Oh, happy servant he in such a posture found!

Be that posture ours, standing at the oriel window which looks out towards the eastern sky, filling the hours with prayer for his speedy advent, so that before ever He comes and knocks, we may be down to greet Him on the doorstep, and receive his salutation of peace, his word of "Well done!"

XXIII. LOVE COVERING SINS

"Above all things, being fervent in your love among yourselves: for love covereth a multitude of sins."--1 Peter 4:8 (R.V.).

IT need not surprise us to find the Apostle Peter insisting so strenuously on love. At a never-to-be-forgotten interview, the Master thrice reminded him that the supreme qualification for ministry was love. And now he takes care to insist upon the possession of love by those who essay to do aught for God in the use of the gifts with which they have been entrusted.

Above all things.--It were better to dispense with all else in the Christian's character and work than to miss love; though, in point of fact, where this is in operation, all that is likely to impress and touch men must be present also. This love must, of course, go forth

in its sympathies and activities to all the world; but it should begin at home. We must have love among ourselves as believers in the same Lord, before we can presume to speak of our love to the great world of men around. Nor must it be a Platonic love, a love of the cold light of reason; it must be fervent, at boiling point, on full stretch, going to the furthest extents of love, and in doing so, learning the breadths and lengths of the unsearchable love of God.

But we have now rather to consider the way in which this love will act; for it is remarkably practical. The state of heart which weeps tender tears and expresses itself in rhapsody or sentiment, but at the same time does nothing to relieve distress or to sacrifice itself for others, is the shadowy ghost of love, its imitation and counterfeit. Love gives itself; pours itself forth as a libation; counts all things loss in comparison with the benefit of the one on whom it has centred itself. It imperils its life to fetch water from the well of Bethlehem; breaks alabaster boxes of very precious ointment on the person of its beloved; and braves the reproaches of a world in arms--surprised to find any one considering the pain or hardship great. Oh for love like this.

1. LOVE COVERS A MULTITUDE OF SINS

(1 Peter 4:8)

These sins are, of course, not those of the man who loves, but the sins of those with whom he is brought in contact. The thought is, in fact, quoted from Proverbs 10:12. And the whole conception may have been based on the filial act Of Noah's sons, of whom it is recorded that they took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered their father's drunken sin.

How few men there are without grave faults! "Even in the most highly cultivated countries there are tracts of land which have never been brought under the plough; so it is with the characters of some men--perhaps of most men; there are patches of waste ground lying here and there utterly useless, offensive to the eye, and covered, not with wholesome corn, but with briars and nettles and weeds of poisonous quality." We need not now enter into the question of how these faults come to be permitted by devout and saintly souls; but, if it be so with respect to these, how much more must it be the case in respect to those who do not avow allegiance to the holy Gospel.

Men are constantly sinning against one another. They take unfair advantage; they deceive with lying words; they lose their temper to each other's face, and slander behind each other's back; they grasp at their own pleasure or gain, irrespective of what it may cost to those whom they were bound to consider; they snarl, and bite, and devour, as the wild beasts of the forest. Ah, what wrongs man has endured at the hands of his fellow!

There are some imperfections in men which, though not to be classed in the front rank of sins, are yet very trying and hard to bear. The vanity which is so self-conscious, and is always expecting flattery or extorting it. The discontent which is ever repining. The restlessness which betrays the irritable brain and the overstrained nervous system. The petulance of the sufferer; and the growing penuriousness of the aged. The cynical temper of those who feel that they have not received their dues in life, and depreciate others. The recklessness which is courage exaggerated. All these are irksome and fretting, and produce almost as much revulsion as blacker kinds of sin.

Now we are not required to form a false judgment of these people, and to think or say that they are not offenders. If they are doing wrong, it is not our duty to whitewash their fault and to call evil good. There is rather a temptation to do so; because, if we are not too strict with others, we can venture to be lenient to ourselves. Thus our moral sense will become warped and deteriorated. To gloss over the faults of other men is often the first step to making light of our own. We must be very careful, therefore, not to look at these faults with that easy good-nature which is careless of the distinction between white and black.

And, again, we are not required to abjure all words of reproach or methods of punishment.--There is a soft, weak, reckless kind of feeling abroad in society, which is always saying pretty nothings, and sprinkling rose water on open sewers, but which does not dare to be stern and severe, and true to righteousness. This is not Christian love; though it is often mistaken for it. The love which God inspires will withhold; will leave the results of sins to work themselves out in the life; will dare to linger for three days at a distance, rather than go at once in answer to the appeal for aid. There is nothing so wholesome, so salutary, so strong--as Christian love.

But with all these limitations, love does cover a multitude of sins.

(1) It forgives.--This is a marvellous prerogative placed within our reach, in the exercise of which we are most like God. Probably in this world only shall we have opportunity to put it into exercise. When once we have entered the world where there is no sin, then will the need of mercy stay; other graces finding full development, but this out of date. The Christian heart does not wait for confession or explanation, but so soon as it is sensible of having been wronged, it looks to heaven asking the Father to forgive; and it cherishes the sweet sense of forgivingness, until it has an opportunity of pronouncing its absolution to the contrite offender. We are to be imitators of God in the swiftness and completeness of his forgiveness.

(2) It avoids giving occasion for sin.-- It has been said that if you have a favourite horse, which always takes fright and shies at a

certain point in the road, you are careful to pass along another road, if possible; or, by speaking to him kindly, to coax him to go by without fear. So if you are aware that a certain subject will always invoke an outburst of hot temper in your friend, true love will lead you to avoid it. You will not needlessly incite to sin if you know how to avoid giving the first inducement.

(3) It is quick to discern some generous construction to put upon the fault, or to quote some consideration to weigh in the opposite scale.—"True, he was excessively dull and slow; but then how trustworthy and reliable!" "Yes, he was very irritable and abrupt; but, then, remember what a strain he has been under lately in his business, not leaving the factory or counting-house till late at night, and going back early in the morning, with no recreation or respite." "Granted, that he is now becoming soured and crabbed; but, then, what a glorious man he was in those earlier days, when he stood in the breach!" "Are you sure that there is not some other explanation possible for his action?" In some such ways as these, Christian love argues with itself and others; and, as the result, many a sin is hindered on its way, and many a fault condoned.

(4) It rebukes with great tenderness.--There are cases where duty demands public censure. The sore must not lie covered up, lest it prove to be deadly. It must be lanced or it cannot be cured. But the lancing is done with exquisite tenderness. The wrong-doer is reproved, rebuked, and exhorted, but with all long-suffering (1 Tim. 4:2). The man overtaken with a fault is restored in the spirit of meekness (Gal. 6:1).

"There is a great deal of spiritual art and skill required for dealing with another's sins; it requires much spirituality of mind, much prudence, and a mind clear from passion, for that blinds the eye and makes the hand rough, so that a man neither rightly sees nor rightly handles the sore he goes about to cure; and many are lost through the ignorance and neglect of that due temper which should be brought to this work." But love gives the delicacy and tact required.

2. LOVE AFFORDS UNGRUDGING HOSPITALITY

(1 Peter 4:9)

This does not mean the giving of extravagant feasts, but rather the calling in of the poor, the lame, the halt, and the blind, who cannot recompense. It is right to look on the home as a talent for God's service, and to use its guest-chamber, not only for our friends, but for his servants. Those who live at the sea-side, or in salubrious neighbourhoods, should consider whether they cannot refresh and re-invigorate some jaded worker. And those who live in large towns might throw open their rooms to young people fresh from the country, and sorely tempted to go wrong for want of a friendly welcome into a circle like that left far away. "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers." In the person of his children the Master still often asks the question, "Where is the guest-chamber?"

Without grudging.--To God the intention of the heart is all important. He loveth a cheerful giver. He takes such delight in doing good that He has no sympathy with anything like reluctance. Not that hospitality should necessarily be profuse: for, if it be, it is difficult to maintain; besides reminding the guest that he is regarded as a stranger: only that which is done should be done freely, gladly, with the whole heart. There is no hospitality so grateful as that which makes the stranger feel at home, because there is nothing forced or restrained, and he is permitted to feel completely at his ease.

3. LOVE MINISTERS

(1 Peter 4:10, 11)

The Apostle speaks here, not so much of the extraordinary gifts with which the early Church was endowed, but of those which are possessed by us to-day. The gifts of speech, of wealth, of administrative ability, of song. All these things are gifts from the hand of God. There is nothing to be proud of; for we have nothing that we have not received. And instead of envying another, let us thank God for what he also has received, asking that we may benefit by it, and win as much of its grace as possible.

Each member of the Church is a steward, entrusted with something.--No note without significance. No wheel without its function. No pin or axle without importance. "Each man hath received a gift." Oh, you who are doing nothing to make the world better, it is not for want of a talent, but because you are not using the talent which you have. You have buried it somewhere in a napkin. Go and unearth it, and put it out to usury. It may not be brilliant; but, so surely as it has been given you will be held accountable for its use. The ability to give is a great talent, and is as much a sacred trust as the power to teach or preach. Let us never forget that we are not owners, but stewards who must render an account of our stewardship to the Master; and He may even now be at the door. It matters not what our fellow-servants think or say, so long as we are right with Him, and are developing and administering to our utmost the precious talents with which we are endowed. The main object with each of us should be, to act up to the ability which God hath given.

Manifold grace is many-coloured grace. As when a ray of light breaks into a spray of many hues, so each of us receives God's grace at a different angle, and flashes it back broken up into some fresh colour. In some it is speech; in others service; in others giving. But all are called to bear their several parts in the great household of the Church, the management of which may be thoroughly disorganized by the sloth or refusal of one.

In all the motive should be the same. The service may be great or small, conspicuous or obscure; but the glory of God must be the supreme passion. If we work from any other motive, we are doomed to disappointment. But none can work for this in vain. In our failure and death, if He wills it, He can be glorified. Let us bring Him glory through Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Priest; and may it flow in towards Him from us, and from all created beings for ever and ever. Amen.

XXIV. THE MOTIVE OF OUR LIVES

"If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever."--1 Peter 4:11.

BEFORE passing on to consider the fiery trial which is to try us, it seems wise to stay very briefly to consider the master-motive which should inspire our lives--namely, "that God in all things may be glorified." This was the motive which actuated our blessed Lord.--When He took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, He set before Him, as the ideal and purpose of his life, to make God his Father more glorious. He speaks of Himself as seeking not his own glory, but the glory of Him that sent Him (John 7:18). On the review of his life from the vantage ground of death He rejoiced that He glorified his Father on the earth, and had finished the work given Him to do (John 17:4). He asked for glory only as the condition of glorifying his Father the more (John 17:2). And He promised to answer prayer, with the avowed intention that God the Father should be glorified in the Son (John 14:13).

We learn from the Lord's own words that the Spirit would glorify Him, after He had passed away to the Father; and what the Spirit does for the Son, through the ages, that the Son also does, and did, for the Father. So that from the perpetual ministry of the Spirit we may form some conception of the ministry of the Son, during his earthly life, and throughout that blessed life which He is spending within the veil, intense, earnest, and blessed; and which is inspired by the same passion for his Father's glory as animated Him in the days of his flesh (John 17:4-5).

But what is glory, and how can God be glorified? Glory is the manifestation of the hidden attributes of the ever-blessed God. He dwells in light which is so transcendent in its burning purity that no mortal eye could bear the blaze which enwraps his Being. But, if unknown, He would be for ever unappreciated and unloved. How could men or angels worship an inaccessible and unknown God? But Jesus Christ, who has dwelt for ever in the bosom of the Father, has declared Him: has brought out his attributes from their dark obscurity, and has displayed them. He has been the organ through which the Divine nature has manifested itself; and as it has been manifested, God has been known and loved and adored by countless myriads who have seen his glory in the face of Jesus Christ, and have fallen down in ecstasies of devotion, ascribing glory to Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb.

The prism, which shows the exquisite tints that hide in sunbeams, glorifies the sun and its Maker. The artist who reads nature's secrets, and catches bewitching smiles which are only seen by her lovers, glorifies Him who lives behind all nature. The student who shows some unsuspected beauty in our favourite author, adds to that author's glory in our esteem. So, though in an infinitely superior sense, as the Son has been the medium through which the Father has shone forth, and has attracted the admiration and homage of all intelligent creatures, we may rightly say that in Him He has been glorified.

This was so in creation, when the creative qualities of the Almighty passed through the Son into efflorescent beauty. It has been so in providence, wherein the sustaining grace of God has been revealing itself through successive ages of activity. It was especially so in the life and words and death of the Redeemer. These were windows into the heart of God. Never had He been known, unless in contact with human sin His Being had broken into the prismatic band of colour which makes the Gospels the priceless possession of mankind. And possibly in those events which are yet to transpire, we shall see how the Lord Jesus will contrive at every turn to bring into ever clearer prominence attributes of the Divine Being, of which we know little or nothing, or which only glimmer on our sight, like sonic distant star on the very confines of creation.

This was equally the motive of the Apostles.--Not for emolument, or human praise; not for power or love of place; not for the souls of men only; but for the glory of God, did they reckon not their lives dear, but endured hardships and persecutions even to martyrdom itself. They yearned to show men how good and glorious He was; or to open the cavern of some heart to receive into its depths his light--that so the extent of his empire might be increased by one more being brought from darkness into light, and from the power of Satan unto God.

And this should be our motive.

(1) It would never disappoint.--If we work for any lower motive, we are always liable to disappointment. Either the desire of our hearts is not realized, or, when we have attained it, we are oppressed with a vague sense of dissatisfaction and depression. But here is a motive which can never mislead us. It is always in front of us. It is an ever-fresh inspiration, ennobling, and inspiring, and

elevating. When we have done our best, it is still in front of us, beckoning us to loftier ascents, to more strenuous endeavours. And the impression produced on us is one of adoration and devotion, which make all our life and work a means of grace.

If we are sensible of working from a wrong or inferior motive, let us bring our being to God, and tell Him that we desire and will nothing so eagerly as to live and work from this loftiest of motives. Ask Him to create the clean heart, and to renew the right spirit. Expect that by his Spirit He will replace the worse by the better, till your soul is on fire for the glory of God.

Many need this word. They are working for the salvation of others; to increase their congregation; to stop the ravages of sin; or to alleviate the distress of those immediately dependent on some sad case of dissolute and shameful behaviour. We cannot wonder at these motives: but they are not the best; and their presence will go far to explain the failure under which many devoted workers groan. Whether you work for God, or pray for the coming of the Spirit, or engage in philanthropic enterprise, be sure to do all for the glory of God.

(2) It will dignify all life.--We make distinctions which do not hold beyond the low ceiling of this world. We speak of some things as sacred, and others as secular; of great and little; of religious and the reverse. We judge things by their appearances and the space they take among men. We forget that with God the difference is entirely one of motives. A sacred motive makes everything sacred; a secular one drags down the most holy office to its own Godless level. Little things become great when wrought from a great motive of love and consecration; but a mean motive will make the gift of a millionaire shrink into a nutshell as small as itself. A religious man will tie everything with a double knot of faith and prayer to God; an irreligious man makes the table of the Lord to become a table of demons.

Men often chafe at being confined to the secularities of daily life, and long to be set free to follow the work of the minister or missionary. If any such read these lines, let them ask their hearts if they are entirely yielded up to the Lord Jesus. If so, let them understand that He has put them where they are for a specific purpose. And then let them fill that position for Him and in his strength, so that many a gleam of his loveliness may be emitted through their behaviour; and men may think better of Him for their sake. "To me to live is Christ; that Christ may be magnified. Whatever be our daily occupation, we should engage in it for the same high motive which should animate the chosen Apostle, or the burning seraph; inscribing on the threshold of each new day, "Glory to God in the highest."

"Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

But, after all, let it never be forgotten that no motive, however pure and lofty, can make our service perfectly acceptable to God. No glory can accrue to Him save through the merit of the Lord Jesus. And, therefore, the Apostle takes care to add, "glorified through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 4:11). There is only one way to God; and our incense must be scattered on coals taken from the true altar, or it can never rise up acceptable and pleasing to Him.

Oh to be animated with absorbing desires for the glory of God! For this to live, and, if need be, die! For this to do the tiniest acts of self-sacrifice and service; and to forget hardship and difficulty in the all-absorbing passion! Let this be our life-motive. Not content to wait for distant ages, let us now ascribe to Him "praise and dominion." Let our lips be full of his praise, and our lives obey his dominion, and let there arise from each moment of our poor lives the glad, and heartfelt, and devout Amen.

XXV. NOT SO STRANGE

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part He is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified."--1 Peter 4:12-14.

ONCE it seemed strange to the Apostle Peter that his Master should think of suffering. Now he thinks it strange that He could have imagined anything else; and he writes to the scattered Christians, bidding them not to count it strange if their path lies through fiery trial and bitter pain.

"Think it not strange!" But it does seem strange--strange that the waters of a full cup should be wrung out to the saints, whilst sinners walk on the sunny side of the hedge! Strange that the wicked should be permitted to plot so much and so successfully against the righteous! Strange that the profane sit on the judgment seats at which the godly and devoted are arraigned for no other fault than their endeavours for the good of men! Strange to find some of the sweetest and noblest of God's children racked with agony, dying of cancer, beset with poverty, misunderstanding, and hatred.

To the eye of natural reason it was strange that thousands of martyrs should die in the amphitheatres of Rome, and illumine the public gardens, whilst Nero revelled in his splendid palace-halls! Strange that the saints of the Lord should suffer in dungeon and at stake, whilst a Bonner, a Jeffries, a Claverhouse, gained place and pelf by their destruction! Strange that the progress of the Church has always been marked by the thin trail of blood! It is hard not to think it strange. And yet it would be stranger still if it were not so. Let us now look into

THE CONSIDERATIONS WHICH ROB SUFFERING OF ITS STRANGENESS

(1) This worm is in revolt.--Marvellous to relate, it has, like ancient Israel, rejected God from its throne, and has chosen another god, who is repeatedly referred to by our Lord as "the prince of this world." Saul rules the visible world; while David, the rightful king, is keeping himself hid amid the growing numbers of those who love him. Is it to be wondered at that the servants of the Divinely designated Prince should experience rough treatment at the hands of the rebel forces who disown his sway? It could not be otherwise.

(2) Along this way the Master went.--From the moment of his birth, when Herod sought to slay Him, to the last moment of his life, He was a lily among thorns, a silent lamb among strangers. His brethren hated Him, and could not speak peaceably to Him. Those whom He came to gather, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wing, refused Him with contumely and reproach, and finally wounded Him to the death. There never was such a union in hatred as that which encircled Jesus as with a ring of forked flame, when He went to the cross. Ah, blessed One, Prince in the realm of misery, as in all other spheres, Thou hast endured the contradiction of sinners against Thyself, till reproach broke Thy heart; and it is not for us to choose a happier pathway, or an easier lot, lest we should seem not to belong to Thee or to bear Thy game.

(3) This is the way home.--When Samuel bade adieu to the young king-elect, on whose life the eyes of all Israel were about to turn, he told him of certain signs which should befall him on his way (1 Sam. 10). And the prophet probably did this to give him materials for forming a true estimate of the Divine authority of the communication which he had just received. He must have felt more and more convinced at every step that Samuel was a true prophet, and that he was on his predestined way. So when we see or experience the hate entertained towards Christianity and Christians by those whom they mean to benefit, and realize that it exactly fulfils the repeated predictions of our blessed Lord, we, too, are persuaded that we are on "the way the prophets went, the road that leads from banishment."

If we were universally beloved, and no voice were ever raised in hatred or calumny, we might truly question whether we were at all on the heavenward track. It is stated so emphatically that if we are without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then we are bastards and not sons. And, again, it is said, through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God. As mountain-climbers after a snowstorm can tell the path by the line of posts placed at intervals along the mountain side, so may Christians tell that they are on the track of the Church by the antagonism manifested against their religion in Jesus Christ.

It must be so just in proportion to the sincerity and consistency of our religious life. If we are living as we should, we condemn the world around us. "There is in the life of the Christian a convincing light which shows the deformity of the works of darkness, and a piercing heat which scorches the ungodly and troubles their consciences. This they cannot endure, and hence rises in them a contrary fire of wicked hatred, and out of this the fiery trials of the godly."

(4) There is an object in such suffering.--Though it may seem to spring causeless from the ground, yet in point of fact it is carefully designed by the skill of the great Artificer. There may have been many a previous secret prayer for growth in grace and usefulness; and the answer has come in the use of fire, file, and hammer, wielded by God, though furnished by the hatred of the sons of men. The malignant deed of cruelty may proceed from the treachery of a Judas; but the cup must be taken as from the Father's hand. Though the missile may be hurled by malice and ill will, yet if it is permitted to pass through the environing presence of God, it has become his appointment for the refining and maturing of the sufferer's character. In this sense his permissions become his appointments. We cannot become new sharp threshing instruments, without fire; and therefore it is not strange when we are plied by it to the uttermost. But One sits beside who holds our pulse between his fingers, and will not let the heat be too searching, or the discipline too severe. There is no other way of eliminating much of the selfish dross of our natures.

(5) Herein we partake of Christ's sufferings.--Of course there is a sense in which Christ's sufferings are unapproachable. They stand as a solitary obelisk on the sands of time. He trod the winepress alone. There is no sorrow like unto his sorrow, in the day in which the Lord afflicted Him. And yet there is a sense in which we fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ. His life in us meets the same treatment as it did in Him. Knowing that we cannot partake of his sacrificial and substitutionary sufferings, yet we may all know something of his other sufferings when He was tempted; when He foresaw the doom of men, and wept; when He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself; when He surrendered Himself to do and suffer the holy will of God! Ah, it is good to share anything with Him. Sweet things are bitter when He is absent, and bitter things sweet if He is near. Would that we were closer drawn into his most intimate friendship, though the connecting links were clamps of irons forged in the fiery furnace!

As St. Bernard said, He always fled when they wanted to make Him King, and presented Himself when they wanted to crucify Him. With this clearly in mind let us not hesitate to adopt the noble words of Ittai the Gittite: "As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be" (2 Sam. 15:21). And He will surely answer, as that same David did to another fugitive who came to identify himself with his cause: "Abide thou with me, fear not; for he that seeketh my life seeketh thy life, but with me thou shalt be in safeguard." We partake of his sufferings, and He of ours. If anything is too small to tell Him about, it is too small to worry over; but if things worry and fret you, remember that all your affliction He was afflicted, and that when the Sauls persecute the Church they in reality touch the apple of his eye.

Is it not fit that we should follow our Captain? Would it be right for Him to sink fainting beneath his cross, whilst we are carried to heaven on beds of down? Shall He go through seas of anguish, and we pass round them by a safer and easier path? Shall He be beset by enemies, whom we skillfully elude and avoid, leaving Him to his fate? It must not be. If in the days of his flesh each member of his natural body shared in the suffering of the whole, feet and hands and head contributing their quota, but none exempted, so each member of his mystical body may expect to share still in his sufferings, rejection, and crucifixion, throughout the course of the ages as they pass.

(6) Look on to the end.--His glory shall be revealed! His sufferings quicken our anticipations of that blessed day. Too much comfort might make us forget ourselves and think ourselves at home, so that we might not so ardently reach out our hands towards our coming glories. Hence it is good to have been afflicted, because we have been taught to consider more fixedly the certainty and glory of the revelation of our hidden Lord. That is the reality; all things else are the baubles and gewgaws of an hour. And when He appears, we shall appear with Him in glory. Those who have been nearest the cross shall be next the throne. The light of his glory shall also irradiate us. We shall be like Him, and with Him, and in Him, for ever. In proportion to our sufferings shall be the rewards and honours of his kingdom. Ah, what bounding and leaping joy will be ours then, in comparison with which the sufferings of the present will seem unfit to be remembered!

(7) We are compensated for such suffering by the presence of the Spirit of glory.--When such suffering lies heavily on the soul, God sees to it that it is no loser. What is lost from without is replenished from within. As water is thrown on the fire from the one side of the wall, a bright angel on the other pours in oil through a tiny aperture, till the flame breaks out as coals of juniper. Ah, what compensations are ours! The Jews who walk the streets of Tangier and other Moorish towns, the hated of all the people, are said to have exquisitely furnished rooms within their ordinary-looking dwellings, where they surround themselves with every luxury, and comfort themselves. So, as the spiritual man turns from the hatred of men to the special bestowments of God: he is compensated a hundred-fold. When we have least of human love, we have most of God's. When father and mother forsake, He gathers us. When the sun of earthly prosperity sets, we are sensible of the glowing fire in the heart of the pillar of cloud, which otherwise we had never beheld, and which bespeaks his presence and care. Men can never understand this. They only see the prickly shell, not the kernel. They only handle the rough exterior case; they know not the spices and balm hidden within. They can measure what we renounce, but they cannot gauge the wealth of the Divine compensations. You will never know so much of God's converse as when men "send you to Coventry." You will never have so much of the Spirit of glory and of God as when familiar faces are averted, and hands are raised in scorn. Methinks we are more than repaid for all our losses by this far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Let us brace ourselves then to suffer whatever may befall, only anxious that our sufferings are due, not to our want of Christianity but to our possession of it; not because of temper, or evil-speaking, or misbehaviour, but because we are so like the Master, and so near Him. So like Him that we are mud taken for Him. So near Him that we are bespattered by mud flung at Him.

Not as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, but as a Christian. It would be well indeed if we never suffered save as Christians; and whenever such suffering comes to us, let us count it all joy, and take it as the theme for a psalm; as the signal for a fresh outburst of "Glory to God in the Highest!"

XXVI. UNANSWERABLE QUESTIONS

"For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?"--1 Peter 4:17-18.

STORMY times were already breaking on the Church as the Apostle penned these words. Such times had been repeatedly predicted by the Lord, but until now they had not been allowed to break forth in all their terror. A Divine restraint had been laid on the antagonistic influences which lay in wait for the moment in which they should be slipped from their leash. But there was every reason to believe that further respite would be very brief--"The time is come when judgment must begin at the house of God."

Bitter as they are, such times are needed--needed as the north-east wind to break off the dead and useless timber in the spring; needed as the winnow's fan to separate the chaff from the wheat. Without these searching times of judgment, the Church becomes filled with those who make a profession of godliness, but deny its power; whilst without them even the godly and genuine are apt to become too luxurious and self-indulgent, wrapt in slumber, and indifferent to the needs of the world. So from time to time it is needful for God to set Himself to the work of discrimination, of crisis, of judgment.

But the sufferings of this life, at their worst, are only part of a great mystery of pain and judgment which exists, not here only, but hereafter. The believer in Jesus has nothing to fear from that. Whatever may be his present sufferings, they cannot pass the limit of this mortal life; they have no power to send one single stab or thrill over the barrier which separates the two worlds. With the ungodly it is not so. The tempest which breaks on their heads in this life is but the beginning of their sorrows. Through death they pass to greater misery. They depart accursed into fire. They are cast into outer darkness. They are reserved unto a further day of judgment to be punished. Moreover, the sufferings of such as refuse the Gospel are of a very different description, both here and hereafter, to those of God's children. There is the sting of remorse, the reproach of conscience, the bitter sense of severance from God, and love, and hope, and blessedness. Though the believer may suffer, his heart brims with hope; but the heart of the worldling is filled with darkness, the midnight of the soul.

His main end in adverting to the matter at all is with the view of comforting these troubled saints. If, says he, you suffer in time, remember that you will have an eternity of respite. If you suffer as children, rejoice that you will never have to suffer as enemies. If you pass through the deep dark waters of judgment, be sure that your lot is very different from what it would be if you were ungodly and profane. Great though your sufferings may be, they are not to be compared with those of such as reject the Gospel. And, standing on the edge of your own sorrows, you may peer into the seething abyss of theirs, which is indeed a bottomless pit, swathed in mist. And then he concludes this paragraph of suffering with sweet and helpful words about the committal of the soul to God.

1. THE LOT FROM WHICH WE HAVE BEEN SAVED

There are three gradations or phases of rebellion mentioned here: the disobedient, the ungodly, the sinful. Thus does the spirit pass from the negative condition of carelessness to the positive position of rejection. And in its course it treasures up for itself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God. If you obey not the Gospel, you are classed with the ungodly and the profane.

And if such shall read these words, let them consider how certain and awful must be their doom. We are not speaking now of idiots or heathen, or of those who knew not, and yet did commit things worthy of stripes. An infallible authority has told us that they shall be beaten with but few stripes. Our address is to those who have heard the dying words of Jesus, but have turned away from them unmoved, not because they cannot believe, but because they will not, preferring darkness to light, sin to goodness, self to God.

You have seen the righteous suffer, and how difficult they have found it to endure. Though sustained by the presence of God, and the promises of the Gospel; though assured of the certainty and glory of their reward; though able to read love's message in each stroke, and to see the speedy end of all discipline in heaven's azure calm--yet they have only just been able to keep heart and flesh from despair. But how will it be with you when the hour of your sorrow comes, as it will come, here or hereafter? You will have no presence of God to cheer you, no promises on which to lean, no certainty of a speedy termination, no testimony of a good conscience, no prospect of release. Before you only the certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. "Can thine heart endure, or can thine hands be strong, in the days that I shall deal with thee?"

If the children suffer so, with all the alleviations of a Father's love, what will not the rebels suffer! If the sufferings of saints be so heavy, what of those of sinners? If the sufferings of this life are often so terrible, what will those of the next be? If the beginning be fraught with so much anguish, how about the end?

It was the earnest wish of a holy man that his death might be so triumphant that his unconverted sons might be convinced and attracted by the evident power of the Gospel to sustain and cheer in the dark passage of the valley. Instead of this, to his deep regret, his spirit lay under a cloud; he was oppressed with fear and misgiving; and the enemy was permitted to torment him to the uttermost. But these very facts were the ones which most profoundly impressed his children. "For," said the eldest, "we all know what a good man our father was; and yet see how deep his spiritual sufferings were. What then may we not expect, who have given no thought to the concerns of our souls?"

Besides, consider all that required to be done before the righteous could be saved. Expenditure, such as taxed the resources of Divine Omnipotence. An atonement, which could only be achieved by the death in a human body of the infinite God. The gift of the Holy Spirit Himself, to enter and possess corrupt and wayward hearts, winning them to Himself. All the marvellous interpositions of Providence; the teachings of Scripture; the strivings of conscience. And yet, notwithstanding all, how little is effected in many of God's children! Christian character seems to resemble Chat Moss, which swallowed tons on tons of earth apparently in vain, till the

contractors began to despair of ever making even a thin railway embankment across the treacherous bog.

In nature we see glowing worlds, gigantic orbits, vast mountains, noble oceans in their gleaming expanse, cataracts, forests, waterfalls--all worthy of God. But when we come to the moral and spiritual side of his people's character, in spite of all that He has done, we are astonished at the meagre result. They are saved at tremendous cost, and they certainly hardly seem to repay the outlay to which the ever-blessed God has gone.

But if, after all that has been done in them and for them, they are no further forward than they are, what will be the condition of those who remain where the righteous were once, and who have rejected the gracious operations of the Most High? They are charged with sin, with no part or lot in the redemption which the Saviour wrought. They are subject to the abominable pollution of inbred corruption, without the counteracting influence of the Divine Spirit. They are indifferent to those blessed provisions which have engaged the attention of the ever-blessed Trinity from all eternity, and rush heedless into the other world. "Where will they appear?"

There are several of these dread unanswered questions in the Bible. "What will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which shall come from far?" Again: "Who can stand before his indignation, and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?" And again: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" But amongst them all there is not one more terrible and unanswerable than this: "Where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?"

We can only answer the question in the negative. They will not appear in the clouds when Jesus comes again: only his saints will come with Him. They will not appear at the marriage supper of the Lamb: only the blood-washed can enter there. They will not appear on the right hand of the Judge: only the righteous are found there. They will not appear among the blessed throngs of the golden city: for thither entereth nothing that defileth. But when we have ransacked all these places in vain, we have not answered the inquiry as to their abiding place. We must leave this for the solemn light of eternity to disclose.

Oh for tears of blood to weep over their fate! But let us mingle notes of thanksgiving, that we shall never, never know it. We cannot perish. We are the objects, as they might be, of an unchangeable love which cannot be thwarted. Bought by the blood, taught by the Spirit, the subjects of the mighty power of God, we shall yet be more than conquerors. Troubled, but not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; cast down, but not destroyed; staggering, but not failing to our eternal destruction; on the edge of destruction, but brought safe home on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd. Well might Dr. Caesar Malan say to Dr. Gray, turning suddenly on him, when walking with him at Geneva: "Brother, you would not go to heaven if you could help it"; and then, in answer to a look of surprise, added: "But, brother, you must go, for Jesus will not let you go elsewhere."

2. THE METHOD SUFFERING SAINTS SHOULD ADOPT

First, Be sure that you keep in the current of the will of God--"Suffer according to the will of God." Do not go out of your way to incur trouble. Refuse to fling yourselves from the mountain brow at the suggestion of the tempter. Dare not to go far afield from under the canopy of the stately pillar-cloud. Accept all that comes in the natural course of things, but do not sow harvests of pain by presumption or wrong-headedness, or any form of evil doing.

(2) Secondly, Go on doing well--"In well-doing." Do the next thing. Even if maligned, traduced, or misunderstood, persevere in doing well. It does not matter how your good deeds are received by men. If you are like God, you will find them received with contempt and ingratitude. But your sun must still shine and your showers fall on the evil and the good, on the just and on the unjust. You serve the Lord Christ. Live to please Him.

(3) Thirdly, Commit the keeping of your souls to God--Our dying Lord committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously. "Father," he cried, "into thy hands I commit my spirit." And God has vindicated Him. Let us, in life and death, place our souls, our honour, our good name and standing, our prospects and future, without reserve or question, in the hands of God. He is faithful. Creation is witness to his faithfulness. The stars return with unerring punctuality. Seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, do not cease. He satisfies all instincts which He has implanted. He hearkens to every cry which He has instilled. And, therefore, with unerring love and power He will respond to every appeal made to Him by his suffering ones. He who created is faithful to keep those who commit themselves to Him; as He who provided the Atonement is faithful and just to forgive those who confess their sins. "He will redeem their soul from deceit and violence; and, precious shall their blood be in his sight."

Safe and strong, tender and true, are the hands of our faithful God. Drop down into them, they will catch you, and sustain your burdens and yourselves. They can hold the oceans in their hollow; but they are scarred with Calvary's nails. Weary, tired, suffering ones, lie still! none shall pluck you out of the Father's hands. Without anxiety or alarm you may look out from them on the wreck of matter and the crash of worlds. Those hands shall ultimately bear you, as they did your Lord, through all the heavens, and set you down at his own right hand in glory.

XXVII. GOD'S FLOCK AND IT'S SHEPHERDS

"The elders therefore among you I exhort, who am a fellow-elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ. Who am also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Tend the flock of God which is among you, exercising the oversight, not of constraint, but willingly, according unto God; nor yet for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves ensamples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd shall be manifested, ye shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away."--1 Peter 5:1-4 (R.V.).

A VETERAN shepherd is speaking here! As he feels his own strength waning, his heart is away in his loved work, and he is deeply concerned lest it should suffer. The ruling passion is strong even unto death!

Imagine a shepherd's hut far away among the northern hills; stretched on his hard mattress an old shepherd is dying; the strong frame racked with bronchitis; every breath laboured and drawn with pain; fever rapidly consuming his life. Around him stand his sons, inured to peril and hardship. The night which hangs over hill and vale shall not break up under the silver touch of dawn, ere that strong and noble spirit has passed forth to the home for which it has long pined. Bend low and catch his whispered words; mark how they concern the sheep of his care, as he commends them to his boys: "Lads," says he, "mind the flock."

1. WE GET A VIVID GLIMPSE OF THE SIMPLICITY- OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Wherever God's people gathered, there was part of his flock. The flock itself was scattered throughout the whole world, and according to our Master's prayer was one, even as it is to-day. For though there are many folds, there is but one flock (John 10:16, R.V.).

Though some of the sheep are being led by the living fountains of waters beyond the river; and others are treading the stony defiles of this side--yet it is the same flock, bought at the same time, marked with the same initials, belonging to the same Owner. And wherever any believers gather, there is a portion of the one flock, and its officers, teachers, and spiritual guides are just shepherds, pastors.

How eloquent is this silence as to priestly functions! Not a word is said as to the necessity of having properly appointed priests, who should offer a regular sacrifice, and perform holy rites. In the Apostle's judgment there was no need to add aught to the precious blood of the unblemished and spotless Lamb; or to undertake an office which is being performed through all the ages at the throne by the great High Priest. This would have been the moment for such a reference, had it been in his mind; but surely it did not so much as enter his thought. He was more than satisfied to call himself an "elder," and to address these simple-hearted men as being on an equality with himself, with the single exception of their not having, like him, witnessed the sufferings of the Chief Shepherd, by which the flock was purchased (Acts 20:28).

Does not that reference to the sufferings of Christ cast a side-light on one of the darkest hours of Peter's history? From the fact that he ran in the company of the beloved John to search the empty grave, we may infer that he went to his home, when he left the Hall of Judgment with bitter agony of soul. It was too much, however, to stay there alone, while all Jerusalem was astir with the trial and crucifixion of his dearest Friend; and so, when the concourse at Golgotha had emptied the streets, he seems to have stolen forth, making his way by devious by-lanes, till he came on the scene of blood, and, standing afar, was a witness of the sufferings of Christ.

This is the one qualification for tending the flock of God: not to have received a learned education; not to be able to talk glibly or eloquently of spiritual things; not to have been in the imaginary line of apostolic succession--a man may lay claim to all these things, and yet not be competent to feed the flock of God. We must behold, each for himself, the sufferings of Christ; not necessarily with the eye of the flesh, but with the eye of the soul; not with the curious glance of the fickle crowd, but with the fixed loving gaze, which finds in them cleansing for sins and balm for wounds.

And to see those sufferings is not only a qualification for shepherd ship, but for glory. As surely as a man beholds those sufferings sympathetically and believingly, so surely shall he behold the glory yet to be revealed. The one is the prelude to the other. No cross, no crown. But where there is the true cross, crown there must be. It may seem to tarry long. The heart may turn sick at the long delay. But that glory which shines now and again as we climb the Transfiguration Mount shall ere long make a perpetual heaven for us when it is revealed.

2. THE CONDITIONS OF SHEPHERDLY CARE.

Feed is better rendered tend, which includes in one word all the various offices of a shepherd, the leading, feeding, watching, defending. It is not enough to preach to the flock once or twice each week. There must be personal supervision; watching for souls as by those who must give account; seeking them if they go astray; tracking them to the precipice down which they have fallen;

and never resting till the straying sheep is brought again to the fold. All this is included in the word; and we need to do all this if we are to tend the flock of God.

The work must be done from love.--If it is undertaken as the result of the strong pressure brought to bear on him, or for any reward which may be offered, the shepherd does not fulfil the ideal of this passage. "Not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind." None of God's soldiers are mercenaries or pressed men: they are all volunteers. We must have a shepherd's heart, if we would do a shepherd's work. Nor is this love merely the liking which may come from the flesh, or be dictated by the inclination of the soul. There must be the love which is akin to the love of the Chief Shepherd Himself. A love which can endure without return or thanks; which can grow where there is scarcely any soil; and which clings to the least lovely and thankful. That love is only shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. To take the cure of souls only because there is a good living in the family, or for a livelihood, or because it gives position and influence, is a sacrilege which will entail a terrible reckoning for the hireling shepherd.

There is a remarkable addition in the Revised Version--according unto God; which serves to accentuate positively what has already been insisted on negatively. God must call to the work; sustain us in it; and give us all the guidance and grace needed for its efficient performance.

It is hard to give up the familiar reading about God's heritage in favour of the new rendering, your allotted portion. And yet the two expressions are nearly equivalent. For God could not allot that which was not his own. "We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture." My flock is the appellation by which He constantly addresses us. And it is He who allots souls to certain shepherds. Let not those who have small and uninviting charges think lightly of them, since God has entrusted them to their care, and is carefully marking the faithfulness with which the work is done, prepared to reward the true shepherd with a larger charge.

The sphere and people of our ministry should be taken straight from the hands of the Chief Shepherd. We are only accountable to Him. Our work must be done to please Him, and at his direction. We must consult Him about all our plans. We must take his directions as to what part of the green pastures our portion of the flock is to be led into, and by what waters it shall rest. If anything goes wrong we must consider that it should be instantly reported to Him, as the fret and care and burden of direction must certainly be his. If we make mistakes, and the flock suffer through our ignorance, the brunt of the loss must fall on Him. There is no one so interested in the pastor's charge as the Chief Pastor is. He shares all the anxieties, hardships, watchings, and perils of the work. Not to please the flock, not to attract the applause of men, not to gain name and fame, but to do the will of the Chief Shepherd, must be the aim of each true servant of Christ.

And there is to be no imperious over lording. We must not abuse our position. The shepherd must win reverence, not compel it. No servant of God must strive, but be gentle unto all, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves. And since the shepherd, in Eastern mode, must always go before the flock, he must be its example. "Be thou an example of the believers," said Paul to the young Timothy, "in word, in conversation, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity." Those who assume to lead others must be very careful of their behaviour, that they may not be a stumbling-block to any, but that others may be heartened and stimulated by the beauty and consistency of their walk.

Surely, in this conception of the Chief Shepherd there is comfort for those who constitute the flock. When the under-shepherd fails, the Chief Shepherd may be expected to step in to supply his vacated place, or to do his neglected work. Do not grumble to man, but take your complaints to headquarters. And if He does not replace the worthless under-shepherd by another, He will undertake the office of caring for you with his own hands; and you shall cry, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." He will see the work done, or do it Himself.

If these words should meet the eyes of any who are away from the tendance of under-shepherds, let me congratulate them on being superintended by the Chief Shepherd Himself. What could be better? The true description of his care is given in his own words, which deserve careful heed. Ezekiel 34:12-16 might almost excite to envy.

3. THE REWARD OF THE FAITHFUL SHEPHERD

Not the crown of Nemean parsley, destined soon to wither--but of unfading amaranth. A reward for faithful service, which will never grow old, never shrivel, never decay. And thus the memory of the Master's appreciation of the poor service we have rendered will be perpetual. Nor is this all; but some additional strands of glory shall be entwined with the immortelles--" the crown of glory that fadeth not away."

Oh, liberal recompense! oh, marvellous condescension! oh, rapture of delight! The work itself were reward enough, to say nothing of such a compensation as this. Yet let us strive to win each of the three crowns held out to us. The crown of life to those who endure temptation! The crown of righteousness to those who love his appearing! The crown of glory to those who tend his flock! And in the meanwhile let us ask that He should quickly appear, casting aside the veil which hides Him, and manifesting Himself to eyes that long, and hearts that wait for, his appearing. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

XXVIII. THE GARB OF THE HOLY SOUL

"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time."--1 Peter 5:5-6.

ONE of the chief signs of the unrenewed spirit is the haughty self-complacency with which it bears itself. To resent an insult; to stand upon fancied rights; to vaunt superiority; to show "the silver, and gold, and spices, and precious ointment," in the ostentatious and vainglorious way which brought reproof and chastisement on Hezekiah--this is the manner of the world.

And this insidious sin of pride dies hard in the child of God; nay, it may be questioned if ever we shall be perfectly quit of it on this side the gates of pearl. It is Protean in its form, changing with every temperament, suiting itself to every mood, clinging as a Nessus cloak even around the flesh of the converted man. Christian men are proud of their houses, and carriages, and wealth, and position. Christian women are proud of their person, and dress, and rank, and children. Christian ministers are proud of their influence, and sermons, and the admiration they receive. A bit of flattery, a newspaper notice, a conscious success, are food enough for pride to grow fat upon, till it begins to fancy that all the world is thinking of it, and feels that the most extravagant praise is but a grudging tribute to its worth.

May I not press this upon my readers further, urging each to consider his own character and behaviour in the light of these words. We must be convicted of pride before we seek the grace of true humility. Pride is one of the most detestable of sins; yet does it find lodgment in earnest souls, though we often speak of it by some lighter name. We call it independence, self-reliance. We do not always discern it in the hurt feeling, which retires into itself, and nurses its sorrows in a sulk. We do not realize how much it has to do with our withdrawing from positions where we feel ourselves outshone by some one who excels us, and with whom we do not care to enter into comparison with the certainty of being second best. It would not be at all easy for us to be silent; to take the lowest place; to learn--where now we count it our prerogative to teach.

And sometimes, when we are clearly worsted, and obliged to step down, we begin to pride ourselves on the sweetness of our disposition in taking the affront so pleasantly. We are proud of our humility, vain of our meekness; and, putting on the saintliest look, we wonder whether all around are not admiring us for our lowliness. I fear me that Bunyan's shepherd-boy, sitting in the lowland glade, and singing, would have become proud of being so low, had he known that his lowliness was to render him immortal. There is at least one preacher whom I know, who has been proud of his sermons on humility, and ostentatious of his efforts to be meek. And thus, even if the soul should array itself in the garb of humility, however simple and plain it be, there is imminent risk of its becoming vain.

"Of all the evils of our corrupt nature, there is none more connatural and universal than pride, the grand wickedness, self-exalting in our own and others' opinion. St. Augustine says truly, that which first overcame man is the last thing he overcomes. Some sins, comparatively, may die before us; but this hath life in it, sensibly, as long as we. It is as the heart of all, the first living, the last dying; and it hath this advantage, that whereas other sins are fomented by one another, this feeds even on virtues and graces as a moth that breeds in them, and consumes them, even in the finest of them, if it be not carefully looked to. As one head of this hydra is cut off, another rises up. It will secretly cleave to the best actions, and prey upon them. And therefore there is so much need that we continually watch, and fight, and pray against it, and be restless in the pursuit of real and deep humiliation, daily seeking to advance further in it."

The metaphor used in this passage is surely derived from that most touching incident on the eve of the crucifixion, when, though having present to his mind his origin and destiny, our Lord took upon Him the form of a servant. "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments, and took a towel and girded Himself. After that He poureth water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith He was girded." What a lovely vesture did that stripping, that towel, that lowly attitude, between them make! Not even when He stood radiant on the Mount of Transfiguration did He seem to be dressed so fair. Surely Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed as He. And so the injunction comes to us all, that we should adopt the same livery, and each one don his garb. "Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility." The question is --how to be humble.

1. RECOGNIZE THE CLAIMS OF THOSE OLDER THAN AND SUPERIOR TO YOURSELF

"Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder." In Athens it was held to be a matter of first importance that the young should pay deferential respect to their seniors. And even among the precepts of the New Testament, it would be hard to find one more salutary and beautiful than that of the old law: "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man,

and fear thy God: I am the LORD" (Lev. 19:32.).

We need to repeat these maxims of wisdom and grace in the ears of each new generation. It is impossible not to notice the great laxity in such matters which is spreading through modern society, loosening its bands, and affecting its stability. Perhaps it is that children are too early taught habits of self-reliance, or are too precocious in their studies. But certain it is that they are more apt to dictate than to submit. Young shoulders are disinclined for the yoke. And yet how many bitter memories are being stored up for coming days! We remember how Dr. Johnson, in late life, stood bareheaded in the rain, in the market-place at Lichfield, in remorseful remembrance of boyish disobedience to his dead father. "Ye younger, submit."

Of course there are occasions when conscience forbids us to submit; and then we must respectfully state the reasons of our refusal, at whatever cost. But these occasions are comparatively rare. And in all doubtful cases--in all cases where a good conscience is not directly infringed--we should submit. Where young Christians have asked my advice as to the way they should behave, when their parents urge them to go to places which, if left to themselves, they would not choose, I invariably answer that, if their conscience absolutely prohibits them, as to the theatre, music-hall, or ball, they have no alternative but to refuse; but, where the question is as to indifferent things, so long as they are under parental control they should yield, if it be insisted on, after they have stated their scruples or objections.

There are, however, other relationships in life besides that of parent and child. We are constantly thrown with those who have seen more of life; have lived more years; and acquired more experience than ourselves: and who have claims upon us. To all such--unless where their character has absolutely forfeited all their claims on our respect--there should be service without servility; meekness without meanness; consideration without cringing; politeness without a thought of policy.

And the cultivation of this habit of deference to those who are older and better than ourselves, with a distinct intention to acquire thereby some new tinge of humility, is to take a considerable step in that direction.

2. TAKE ALL THE OCCASIONS WHICH LIFE AFFORDS OF SERVING OTHERS

"All of you be subject one to another."

Of course there must always be a diversity of function in society; but the very positions in it which we have inherited or acquired give us opportunities of exercising this constant life of self-denial for those around us.

To submit to discomfort, that we may promote their comfort. To submit to inconvenience, that we may make life easier for them. To submit to the cross, that we may save them, though at the cost of our blood. It is the same teaching as came out before in the injunction to "submit to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake."

Yield before wrong. Hold your mouth in subjection, choking back the proud, resentful words leaping up there for expression and chafing for utterance. Give up even your rights, rather than go to law to keep them. "If any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also." And submit in such matters, not from mean-spiritedness or cowardice, but because you will accept each opportunity which is put into your way of acquiring the grace of humility.

Let the servant take the rebuke of the master meekly, not careful to vindicate himself, save where the cause of God may be jeopardized by his fault. Let the employee receive the remonstrance of his employer quietly, eager to comply with any righteous demand, and to learn in silence. Let the believer who has said or done anything unkind and unjust to a fellow-believer confess it with shame, and put the scourge into his brother's hands, while he stands meekly to bear the inflicted strokes. Let us not shrink from humbling ourselves before our servants and children, if we have sinned against them. Strong as rocks and lions in our advocacy of the truth as it is in Jesus, let us be as the reed swept by the storm when it is merely a question of our good name, and prestige, and well-being. And let our single purpose be in all to learn the grace of humility, in all the occasions for its practice which our God throws in our way.

3. ACCEPT ALL THE DIVINE DISCIPLINE OF LIFE

"Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God." Ah, what infinite sorrow men lay up for themselves in resisting the Divine will! If you fret and chafe against his appointments, finding fault with Him because He has not given you another lot, some other partner for your life, some more congenial occupation, you cannot but be wretched. For at the bottom of all such dispositions, which fume as the waves of the sea, there lurks a feeling of disappointed pride, which thinks that it deserved some better treatment from God, and considers itself ill-used.

But who are we that we demand so fair and comfortable a lot--we whose first father was a gardener who stole his Master's fruit; who have sprung from the dust but yesterday; and who have piled Alps on Andes of repeated sin? Let us accept what God sends. The worst is ten thousand times better than we deserve. The hardest is the better evidence of a love which dares not spoil us. The whole is dictated and arranged by such wisdom as cannot for a single instant err.

The shadow cast by that mighty hand is dense and dark; its pressure is almost overwhelming. David cried, as he felt it, "Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture was turned into the drought of summer." But bend beneath it. Its pressure may be felt in personal suffering, in rebuke, or shame, or persecution, or in loss of property, or in some other form of chastisement, yet take each as another opportunity of putting into practice this injunction to humility.

"Lie still my soul! whatever God ordains is right and good; thou deservest nothing better; what right hast thou to be sitting at the royal table at all, when thou hadst forfeited it for the swine's fare? If thou hadst thy rights, thou wouldst be now in the outer gloom."

4. OTHER METHODS MAY BE SUGGESTED.

Let us try to get a true estimate of ourselves. Let us judge ourselves now that we be not judged at the last:--

(1) Look into thyself in earnest--"And truly, whosoever thou be that hast the highest conceit of thyself, and the highest causes of it, a real sight of thyself will lay thy crest. Men look on any good, or fancy of it, in themselves, with both eyes, and skip over as unpleasant their real defects and deformities. Every man is his own flatterer. But let any man see his ignorance, and lay what he knows not over against what he knows; the disorders in his heart over against any right motion of them; his secret follies against his outwardly blameless carriage--and it shall be impossible for him not to abase and abhor himself?

(2) Accustom yourself to look at the good in others--Many of us compare ourselves at the best with others at their worst, and of course we come off with advantage, at least in our own esteem. We are so much keener to see the defects than the excellences of our companions. We look at the one with the magnifying glass, and at the other with the reversed telescope. But if we were to be as keen on their virtues as now on their vices, always looking for the compensating grace, always making such allowances as we can find, always magnifying what is lovely and of good report, and thinking of these things, then we should find the bubbles of our self-congratulation pricked and burst.

(3) Accept all kind, good things, from whatever source, as the gift of God, and tune your heart in praise to Him--It is very pleasant to be thanked and kindly spoken of; to be surrounded by dear friends with their honeyed words: and we may be thankful when such hours shine on us; as it is impossible for them to last, if only we are true to our Master. And whilst they tarry they will not hurt us, if only we pass on all kind speeches in thanksgiving and praise to God. When we can transmute all praise, into Praise, all speeches into Speech, and gifts into Sacrifices, failing down to worship Him who is the giver of every good and perfect gift, we shall emerge from the ordeal, without having contracted guilt.

(4) Claim the humility of Jesus--As you go through the world, not only set yourself to resist pride, but make every temptation towards it an occasion for lifting your heart to Christ to receive from Him something more of his own sweet and humble spirit. "Thy humility, Lord!" There are many incitements to this: God resisteth the proud.--The Greek word here is very expressive. He sets Himself in battle array. Ah, miserable attempt to withstand God. Pharaoh perishing in the Red Sea is the perpetual evidence of the futility of the conflict. All things may seem to prosper for a time; but discomfiture is certain, and will be final.

He giveth grace to the humble--"His sweet dews and showers of grace slide off the mountains of pride, and fall on the low valleys of humble hearts, making them pleasant and fertile. The swelling heart, puffed up with a fancy of fulness, hath no room for grace. The humble heart is most capacious, and, as being emptied and hollowed, can hold most." The vessels which are most heavily laden sink lowest in the water; and those which can sink lowest, without danger, are they which are most heavily freighted. Oh for the humble heart which can hold most grace; and, as it obtains more, sinks still lower in its own esteem!

He will exalt in due time--"The lame take the prey." The meek inherit the earth. The master of the feast bids those who take the lowest rooms to go up higher. Moses, the meekest man, has taught the principles of jurisprudence to half the world, and sits on the judgment-seat. The martyr's stake has ever been a throne from which the sufferer has ruled after-ages. The men and women of gracious, retiring spirit wield the truest authority in town or village. These who can die on the cross, pass through the grave to the Ascension Mount. Be humble, not only in outward mien, but in the inner shrine of thy spirit; and in due time, not to-day or to-morrow, but in his own time the Lord will exalt thee to inherit the earth.

XXIX. CARE AND WHAT TO DO WITH IT

"Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you." (1 Peter 5:7.)

EVERY word of this precious verse is golden. And the fact of its standing here as a Divine command is a proof, not only of what is possible for us to do, but of what God is prepared to enable us to do. His commands are enabling; his words are power-words; his light is life. If only you are willing to live this glad, free, uncareful life, and dare to step out on the waves of his carefulness, you will

find that, with the resolve to obey, there will come from Him the wondrous power that makes obedience possible.

And it is in the highest degree necessary to obey this precept. So only can we be peaceful and strong. We cannot stand the strain of both work and worry. Two things come between our souls and unshadowed fellowship with God, sin and care. And we must be as resolute to cast our care on the Lord as to confess our sins to Him, if we would walk in the light as He is in the light. One yelping dog may break our slumber on the stillest night. One grain of dust in the eye will render it incapable of enjoying the fairest prospect. One care may break our peace and hide the face of God, and bring a funeral pall over our souls. We must cast all our care on Him, if we would know the blessedness of unshadowed fellowship.

But, besides the blessedness we lose in giving way to care, we must remember that such behaviour sorely grieves and dishonours God. It grieves Him, as love must grieve when suspected of insincerity. And it also sorely dishonours Him. We judge a parent by the report given of him in the words and behaviour of his children. If they seem half-starved and miserable, or look wistfully to us for a dole of help, or complain bitterly of the hardships of their lot, we conclude--however wealthy he may be as to his income, or munificent as to his gifts--that he is hard and cruel: and we withdraw from him as far as possible. So, if the world judges of God by the looks and words of many of his professed children, is it wonderful that it is less attracted than repelled? Either there is no God, or He is powerless to help, or He does not really love, or He is careless of the needs of his children--such must be the reflections of many, as they look on the weary, careworn, anxious faces of God's professed people, and remark in them the same long deeply-ploughed furrows as the years have made for themselves.

We are either libels or Bibles; either harbour-lights or warning signals; either attractions or detractors; and which we shall be depends very much on what we do with CARE.

Of course there must ever be the discipline and chastisement of life. Our Father deals with us as with sons: and what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? And these strokes of his rod, these cups mingled by his hand, must be bitter to the flesh. But all this is very different from "care." There may be pain--but no doubt of the Father's love, no worry about the issues, no foreboding as to the long future, which to the eye of faith shines like the horizon-rim of the sea on which the sun is shining in its utmost splendour, while dark clouds brood overhead.

Care, according to the Greek word, is that which divides and distracts the soul, which diverts us from present duty to weary calculations of how to meet conditions which may never arrive. Fret; worry; anxiety; the habit of anticipating evil; crossing bridges before we reach them; the permission of foreboding fears about the future; all that attitude of mind which broods over the mistakes of the past and dwells on the shadows which coming events may cast, rather than on the love and will of God--this is Care.

1. OUR TREATMENT OF CARE

Casting all your care upon Him.--The Greek verb indicates not that we must keep doing it, but do it once for all.

Who does not know what it is to awake in the morning with a sense of heaviness and depression, and, before one is well aroused, to be conscious of a voice whispering a long tale of burdens to be carried, and difficulties to be met, as the hours pass on!

"Ah," says the voice, "a miserable day will this be."

"How so?" we inquire, fearfully.

"Remember, there is that creditor to meet, that skein to disentangle, that irritation to soothe, those violent tempers to confront. It is no use praying, better linger longer where you are, and drag through the day as you may. You are like a victim in the tumbril (an open cart that tilted backwards to empty out its load, in particular one used to convey prisoners to the guillotine during the French Revolution) going to be guillotined."

And too often we have yielded to the suggestion. If we have prayed, it has been in a kind of hopeless way, asking God to help, but not daring to think He would. There has been no assurance, no confidence, no calm within, no tranquility without. Alas for some! They always spend their lives thus. One long, weary monotone of anxiety--struggling against winds and waves, instead of walking over the crests of the billows; treading a difficult, stony pass, instead of being borne along in one of the twenty thousand chariots of God.

How infinitely better to cast our care upon the strong, broad shoulders of Christ! Treat cares as you treat sins. Hand them over to Jesus one by one as they occur. Commit them to Him. Roll them upon Him. Make them his. By an act of faith look to Him, saying, "This, Lord, and this, and this, I cannot bear. Thou hast taken my sins; take my cares: I lay them upon Thee, and trust Thee to do for me all, and more than all, I need. I will trust, and not be afraid." As George Herbert says so quaintly in his sonnet, put care into Christ's bag. There is no surer path to rest than to pass on to Jesus all the anxieties of life, believing that He takes what we give at the moment of our giving it; that it instantly becomes a matter of honour with Him to do his best for us: and surely it is a sacrilege to take back any gift which we have put into his hands.

"Blessed be the Lord, who daily beareth our burden" (Ps 68:19, R.V.).

There are two or three preliminaries before this committal of care is possible. We must have cast our sins before we can cast our cares; in other words, we must be children in the Father's home. Then also we must be living in God's plan, sure that we are where He would have us be, camped under his brooding pillar-cloud. And, in addition, we must have yielded up our lives to Him, for Him to have his way in them. Nor must we neglect to feed our faith with promise. Without her natural food she pines. But when these conditions are fulfilled, it is not difficult to

**Kneel, and cast our load,
E'en while we pray, upon our God,
Then rise with lightened cheer.**

The cup may still have to be drunk, the discipline borne, the work done; but the weary ache of care will have yielded to the anodyne of a child's trust in One who cannot fail.

2. DIFFERENT KINDS OF CARE

There is care about our growth in grace.--It is very unreasonable; and yet how common! We fret because we fear that we are not getting on fast enough, and run to and fro in our anxiety to pick up something from other people. As well might a lad in an infant class fret because he may not enter the higher classes of the school. But surely his one business is to acquire the lessons set before him by the teacher. When those are learnt, it will be for the teacher to give him other and harder ones, and to advance him to positions where quicker progress may be made. And it is for us to learn each day the lessons which the Lord Jesus sets us, and to leave to Him the responsibility of leading us forward in the knowledge and love of God. Cast the care of your growth and attainments on the great Leader of souls, and be content to sit at his feet, learning the lessons He assigns.

There is care about our Christian work.--How to maintain our congregations? How to hold our own amid the competition of neighbouring workers? How to maintain the efficiency and vigour of our machinery? How to adjust differences between our fellow or subordinate workers? How to find material enough to supply the incessant demand for sermons and addresses? How to shepherd a large flock of souls? What elements of care are hidden in each of these! And in what numberless cases the look of weary anxiety betrays the heartache within!

But one is inclined to ask sometimes, Whose work is it? If it is yours, resting on your shoulders only, there may be some reasonableness in the carrying of care. But if, as is surely the case, the work is your Master's, the burden should be his also. The prime worker is not you, but Christ. He is working through you. You are but his servant. All that you are responsible for is to do what He bids to the uttermost of your power; and He must bear all the cost and responsibility beside. If things are not going smoothly, go and tell Him, and cast all the anxiety of it back on Him, leaving it to Him to extricate or reinforce you.

There is care about the ebb and flow of feeling.--Our feelings are very changeable. They are affected by changes in the weather and temperature, by the state of our digestion and liver, by over-weariness, by want of sleep, by a thousand nameless causes. No stringed instrument is more affected by minute changes than we are; and we are apt to worry when the tide of emotion is running fast out, defying our efforts to retain it. But, if we are not conscious of any sin or negligence to which this subsidence of emotion may be attributed, we may cast the care of such an experience on our Saviour. He knows our frame; and, as we pass down the dark staircase, let us hold fast to the hand-rail of his will, willing still to do his will, though in the dark. "I am as much thine, and devoted to Thee, in the depths of my being now, as when my heart was happiest in thy love."

There is care about household and commercial matters.--Servants, with their frequent changes; employers, with unreasonable demands; customers and clerks; creditors and debtors; children, with the ailments of childhood, and the waywardness of youth. To mention any one of these is to touch a bitter spring of care. There are some whose businesses are specially liable to cause anxious, worrying thoughts. Many Christians always think that they must come to beggary; they refuse to enjoy the good things within their reach, because of certain dreaded possibilities. Alas! for that phantom workhouse which bounds the pathway of so many lives, but which is never reached! But each of these sources of worry may become a means of grace, a bond between Jesus and the soul, if placed at his feet, and definitely entrusted to his care.

Do not be satisfied with rolling yourself on God, roll your burden also. He who can carry the one can carry the other. When a tiny boy, trying to help his father move his books, fell on the staircase beneath the weight of a heavy volume, his father ran to his aid and caught up in his arms boy and burden both, and carried them in his arms to his room. And will God deal worse with us? He cannot fail or forsake. He can smite rocks, and open seas, and unlock the treasuries of the air, and ransack the stores of the earth. Birds will bring meat, and fish coins, if He bid them. He takes up the isles as a very little thing--how easily, then, your heaviest load: while there is nothing so trivial but that you may make it a matter of prayer and faith.

So Leighton sweetly says:---"When thou art either to do or suffer anything, when thou art about any purpose of business, go, tell God of it, and acquaint Him with it--yea, burden Him with it--and thou hast done for matter of caring. No more care, but sweet, quiet diligence in thy duty, and dependence on Him for the carriage of thy matters. Roll over on God, make one bundle of all; roll thy cares, and thyself with them, as one burden, all on thy God" (Psa. 36:5).

3. THE REASONABLENESS OF THIS METHOD OF LIFE.

"For He careth for you."

Of course, if we persist in acting only for ourselves, we must do the best we can for ourselves; but if we can hand over all matters to God, we shall find that He will do infinitely better for us than we had dared to hope. Such is God's love to us that He always goes far beyond our farthest anticipations.

"Exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." (Eph 3:20)

If the father is providing for to-morrow's needs, why should his little boy leave his play, and lean pensively against the wall, wondering what had better be done? If the pilot has come on board, why should the captain also pace the deck with weary foot? If some wise, strong friend, thoroughly competent, has undertaken to adjust some difficult piece of perplexity for me, and if I have perfect confidence in him, and he assures me that he is well able to accomplish it, why should I fret longer? The thing is as good as done, since he has taken it in hand.

Doubtless there seems a marvellous chasm between Him and you. But it is bridged by the silver arch of Divine care. God cares for you so much that He came Himself in the person of his Son to redeem you; there was never a time He did not love you, brood over you, and care for you. He cares for you so much as to listen to your least sigh or cry amid the beat of heavenly music and the acclamations of the blessed. The mighty heart of Deity itself is full of a fathomless carefulness for all that concerns you. No mother cares over her sick child as He over you. Each movement and need and desire is read long before expressed or even felt.

Let us trust Him. Tongue cannot tell the completeness, the delicacy, the tender thoughtfulness of the care that will gather and shelter us, as the nervous, careful hen gathers her brood under her wing. "I would have you without carefulness."

XXX. CONFLICT

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."--1 Peter 5:8-9.

It would appear that the image of the flock is still in the Apostle's thought; and that he recalls some such incident as that narrated by David, when as a stripling he stood before Saul and related how, as he kept his father's sheep, there came a lion and took a lamb out of the flock; and that he went after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth, and caught him by the beard, and slew him. However safely folded and watched, no flock is secure against the attempt of the beasts of prey which infest the wilderness. Especially at night they will prowl around, seeking for the unguarded spot, or the unwary sheep, and filling the night with their terrible roarings.

The figure of the lion roaring around the flock reminds us of a rendering given by some to one of God's earliest words to men, when He warned Cain that sin, like a wild beast, was crouching at the door of his heart, waiting to spring in. And we may not forget how our Lord described the coming of the wolf to the flock entrusted to the hireling shepherd, filling him with panic, and resulting in the catching and scattering of the sheep. Satan is evidently no myth, no imaginary being, to the writers of the New Testament. From the distinct references made to him by our Lord, to the last great conflict described in the Apocalypse, when he is finally vanquished, there is abundant and emphatic evidence that, behind the veil of the visible, he is heading a great revolt against the rule of God, and is pledged to do his worst by stratagem or skill against his dominion and his saints. It is a subtle manoeuvre of his to lead men to suppose that there is no devil at all. A gang of thieves is never so dangerous as when they have it widely rumoured that they have left the neighbourhood. Any artifice succeeds which throws us off our guard.

There is no need to suppose that all God's people are watched and attacked by the devil himself; for this would almost invest him with the attributes of omniscience and omnipresence. But he is supported and abetted by myriads of wicked spirits in the heavenly places, any one of which waits to do his will and to execute his plans; and the entire host, with long experiences of the frailties of human nature, with desperate malice against God, with unwearied watchfulness to do us harm, rests not day or night, but goes to make up that one malign and terrible adversary of which the Apostle speaks. And, indeed, we might relinquish all hope of being able to withstand his onsets, did we not know that he has been vanquished by our Leader, who is prepared to overcome him again,

in and through and for each of those who put their trust in Him. O Victor of the Garden, the Cross, and the Resurrection morning, as Thou didst overcome Satan in thine earthly sojourn, so overcome him again in each of us that we may be more than conquerors, because He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world!

1. THE DESCRIPTION HERE GIVEN OF THE TEMPTER

He is our adversary.--The prophet Zechariah was not mistaken when he beheld Satan, standing as an adversary beside the high priest clothed in his dishevelled robes, and standing there to resist him. For, when the veil is drawn aside, in the majestic prologue to the Book of Job, Satan is discovered suggesting an evil and mercenary motive for the uprightness of the patriarch. "Doth Job serve God for nought? Put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to thy face." And thus, when he was cast out of the Heavens, as a prelude to his being cast down into the bottomless pit, it is not to be wondered at that loud voices were heard rejoicing that the accuser, who accused the saints night and day before God, had been cast out. But the defeats which he has met with already have only exasperated his hatred the more, and he now roams the earth in all the greater wrath, because he knows that a limit has been put upon his power, and that he hath but a short time.

He roars as a lion.--There is terror in his threatenings, which may well strike panic into timid hearts. But we must remember that it is the expending of ineffectual rage. He makes up in noise what he has lost in power. He hates our Shepherd, though he cannot now hurt Him. He did his worst against Him, and failed. He must content himself with bellowing out his hate; though this, too, shall be stayed. So Rutherford used to say that he preferred dealing with a roaring devil. It fills Satan with redoubled chagrin and malignity to know that the weakest saint is more than a match for him, if he dares to resist him, steadfast in the faith, and armed in the panoply of God. "My sheep," said the Chief Shepherd, "shall never perish."

He walketh about seeking.--There is no church-fold which he does not eagerly visit; bent on injuring its usefulness, or snatching away its careless professors. No bishop so busy in his diocese as he. If only he can vitiate Christian teaching by false doctrine, so that every sermon may carry with it error enough to cancel its truth and power; if he can involve the leading professors in inconsistencies which shall neutralize the effect of their testimony; if he can entrap the weaklings into pride, or jealousy, or sensual pleasure, or backsliding; if he can scatter the flock by persecution, or bury it in a snowstorm of formalism, or drown it in a spate of worldliness, then he is full of glee. And he is always on the watch for such a chance. "Going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it."

Satan considers the saints. "Hast thou considered my servant Job?" No neglect of the morning watch, no permission of the first faint thoughts of evil, no unwatchfulness, no tampering with wrong, escapes his attentive scrutiny. He never yet missed an opportunity of following up any clue, or making the most of any advantage. We are engaged in conflict with an accomplished and merciless opponent, who is quick to plunge in his sword wherever the joints of the armour open, and whenever we give him the chance. What need, then, for constant vigilance on our part to meet and parry his attacks! "Be sober! be vigilant!" And what need also for the ceaseless intercession of Him who sees the approach of temptation, and anticipates it by his prayers! "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

2. THE AIM OF SATANIC TEMPTATION

When the devil tempted our Saviour, He could truthfully say, "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me. But only He could say this. In all else there is a certain proneness to go wrong, to which the great adversary makes his appeal. And before we can hope to vanquish assaults from without, we must be careful to have taken up that attitude with respect to the inner realm which is ours in the holy arrangements of God. We cannot successfully vanquish assaults from without, whilst there is revolt or anarchy within. And for this reason the Apostle has been careful, at the commencement of the previous chapter, to deal with the question of the flesh. For only when we have truly experienced what God is prepared to do in relation to the flesh, shall we be able to stand in his grace against our terrible adversary, or maintain the attitude of uncompromising vigilance and unremitting watchfulness. Perhaps there is, as Bengel suggests, a hint of this in the admonition, Be sober!

When man first came from his Maker's hand, all his natural appetites and desires, which in themselves were pure and necessary, were under the control of the will, which itself was true to God, willing only what God willed, and obeying each prompting of his Spirit. But man swerved from that blessed condition, substituting self for God, and his own pleasure for obedience to the Divine law and will. And ever since that one fatal act there has been transmitted to all after-generations a bias towards evil, a tendency to repeat that first sin in aggravated forms, a predisposition to the gratification of natural instincts, irrespective of the Divine requirements. This inherited tendency is due to the operation of that great principle which scientific men know as the law of heredity, and which operates through all races of the creatures with which we are familiar in our world-home.

The sphere in which this inherited tendency mostly manifests itself is in relation to the appetites and desires of the body, the natural action of which has been much interfered with through successive generations, and which, as they come to us, bear evidence of the abuses to which they have been subjected by our progenitors. Now, of course, these natural impulses, though vitiated in their

operation, cannot constitute sin until they have inflamed the imagination, captured the heart, and conquered the will. But, as a matter of fact, there is not one of us in whom they have not done all these things again and again, and in doing so have increased and accentuated our susceptibility to evil. This perverted tendency of our appetites, coupled with its inevitable influence on the inner life, is what the Word of God calls the flesh.

"The flesh, with the passions and lusts" (Gal. 5:24).

"We all had our conversation in times past, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind" (Eph. 2:3).

God has judged this flesh in the person of Jesus, made in the likeness of sinful flesh, and has assigned it to the cross. There, on Calvary, is God's verdict and doom for the flesh. And in his thought and purpose our flesh has been crucified there. "Our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away" (Rom. 6:6, R.V.). Also, "They that are of Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh" (Gal. 5:24, R.V.)--statements which cannot be appropriated by one or two, but are made generally of all the saints, as they are considered in the person of their Representative and Head. Oh that there were not, through our failure in faith and obedience, so great a gap between what all the saints are in the purpose and thought of God, and what they are in their practical realization!

But God has done more than assign "flesh" to the cross. He has given us his Holy Spirit, whose special office it is to restore to the inner life, and to the body also, a right-ordered and natural existence. There are some who seem to suppose that He takes the evil bias entirely away, so that they are as Adam before he fell. In our judgment this is contrary to the teaching of Scripture, which recognizes the presence of the flesh in believers, though it expressly teaches that they are "not in the flesh." But the Holy Spirit is eager to dwell in each believer mightily, as a counteractive agency, lusting against the flesh, restraining its every manifestation, keeping it utterly in the place of death; and this so calmly and quietly, that the happy subject of his grace may begin to suppose that the flesh is extirpated or eradicated, when in point of fact it is present still, and would reveal itself, if the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit were restricted for a single moment (Gal. 5:17, R.V.).

It is not a question of what Christ can do, but of what He has undertaken to do. Of course, a moment is coming when we shall put off this body, and when the redemption of our entire being will be completed in the acquisition of a body fashioned in the likeness of our Lord's. But till then we are doomed to carry about a body which is apt, through inclinations excited in the mind, to hurry us into sin (1 Cor. 9:27). Yet surely it is more blessed to have the constant indwelling, restraining, sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit, as the source of our deliverance from the flesh, than to have back again the nature of unfallen Adam, which might at least fall again before the onset of the tempter.

We once lived in a house, the cellar kitchen of which was so damp that the servant was able sometimes to sweep up the white mould from the tiles; but as long as we kept up a roaring fire, the damp was undiscernible, and the kitchen was warm and pleasant. Indeed, no stranger would have realized how strong the tendency to damp was. But if there was no fire for weeks, or even for days, the damp revealed itself. So, when the Spirit works mightily in the soul, He is like the ruddy glow of a furnace, and the evil tendencies of our nature are as if they were not.

We were informed that the workmen employed in making the subterranean tunnel through London came on a bed of sand, through which water was flowing freely, but they were kept perfectly dry so long as the parts excavated were filled by a strong blast of compressed air. So is the heart kept pure and sweet as long as the Spirit dwells in it in power. It is of the utmost importance, then, to live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit, that we may not fulfil the lusts of the flesh.

Temptation does not only come from without, as some say. The spark may be flung in from without; but there is a magazine of gunpowder within. The match would be struck on the lid in vain if there were not a prepared surface on which it would ignite. "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed" (James 1:14). And it is because of the known presence of these evil tendencies within that the devil watches us so closely.

As long as we are kept by the mighty power of God, we are safe. The conflict is no longer within, but without. And all hell shall expend itself in vain on the nature which is experiencing the blessed reign of the Spirit of God, which makes us free from the law of sin and death. Yield yourselves to God; receive the filling of the Holy Spirit by faith; and then march to assured victory through the power of the Son of God.

3. CONSOLATION TO THE TEMPTED

(1) Your temptations are not an uncommon experience--We have all the same constitution; and there is much more similarity in our temptations than we suppose. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man." "The same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."

(2) All temptation is under the restraint of God--As in the case of Job, Satan cannot tempt us without God being first acquainted

with his designs. And, as in the case of Peter, there seems to be almost a seeking and receiving of permission to tempt before Satan assails. In any case, no temptation befalls us greater than our power to combat and overcome. And we are permitted to be tempted, that we may learn to avail ourselves of the resources of which we might otherwise be unaware.

(3) Satan can be conquered.--

Watch and pray.

Be sober in your tastes and habits, in your words and deeds.

Never neglect to abide in your strong fortress, Christ.

Keep with the flock of God.

Nourish your souls with the Word, that you may be healthy and strong.

Gird on the whole armour of God.

Resist the first insignificant advances of the foe.

Be steadfast in the faith.

Look instantly to Jesus to cast the panoply of his protection around you; and to stand between you and your assailant, as a shield before the body of the warrior.

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Go into battle assured of success: This your talisman,

They overcame by the blood of the Lamb; this your battle-cry, Jesus saves, Jesus saves.

XXXI. THE CALL TO ETERNAL GLORY

"The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered awhile, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you." 1 Peter 5:10.

WHAT a contrast is presented between the attacks referred to in the previous verses, and the all-sufficient grace, which lies as a great depth beneath this!

Why should we fear the attacks of the great adversary of souls, so long as the God of all grace is ours? There is no kind of grace we can need, which does not reside in Him; yea, grace on grace, so that when one supply is exhausted there is always more to follow. And the attacks of Satan are, perhaps, permitted that we may be constrained to realize and avail ourselves of the stores of grace which are treasured up in Jesus Christ our Lord. "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and in Him ye are made full" (Col. 2:9-10, R.V.).

Edinburgh Castle, perched on its grey crags, is said to have been captured only once; and then through a shepherd leading a small storming party up the precipitous western cliffs, which had been left undefended because deemed to be inaccessible. and yet there was benefit even in that apparent disaster, because it indicated a weak spot in the defences for all after-time, and led to a more perfect line of fortification. So we may be thankful when temptation assails us, indicating some point of our character which needs immediate attention, and summoning us to look into the Divine storehouse for some special and unrealized form of grace, which from that moment is claimed and appropriated by the exercise of faith.

It is an exceedingly beautiful title: "The God of all grace!" Illuminating grace for the seeker; justifying grace for the believer; comforting grace for the bereaved and sorrowful; strengthening grace for the weak and downtrodden; sanctifying grace for the unholy; living grace, and dying' grace. Bring hither the pitchers of your need. The grace of God, which is his unmerited love, will conform itself to their special shape, and will seem to be just fitted to your exigencies and requirements. The ocean is known by several names, according to the shores it washes, and its very tints vary with the shades of the rocks that line the margin of its bed; but it is the same ocean, and its waters are identical in every place. So is it ever the same love of God, though each needy one discovers and admires its special adaptation to his need. "The God of all grace."

It is almost too marvellous to credit, and yet it must be so, that He has called us unto his eternal glory. He is the giver of all grace; and He calls us to all his glory. We therefore stand in his grace, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God (Ro 5:2).

We shall ere long behold that glory which is just the shining forth, in all their loveliness, of the manifested attributes of the ever-blessed God. This was our Saviour's request, which carried with it the certainty of realization. "Father," He said, "I will that they whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, that they may behold my glory." Not on his back parts only shall we look, as Moses did, as the procession swept down the mountain pass; nor for so transient a moment as the disciples beheld his glory when they were with Him on the Holy Mount; but face to face, in prolonged and steadfast fellowship. The Queen of Sheba, contrasting her brief visit to Solomon's court with the lot of his servants who lived there, broke into exclamations of envy at their lot. "Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants which stand continually before thee." Conceive, then, what our lot is to be through endless ages!

Nor shall we behold it only...we shall share it.--"The glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them." Co-heirs with Jesus in all that He has won through his humiliation and death. Sharers in his unsearchable riches; participators in his unspeakable and triumphant joy; one with him in a unity, which in its mystic circle weaves the Deity itself into oneness with redeemed men. "That they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in Me; that they may be made perfect in one."

And this glory is eternal, not as to the length, but as to the quality of it.For it is difficult to speak of the successions of time, when considering that state of being from which time is expressly eliminated. The word certainly means more than never-ending being. It involves conceptions of the imperishable, the untainted, the altogether satisfying, the Divine. Bread, of which if a man eats, the vast appetite of his spirit is sufficed. Joy, of which he can never tire. Knowledge, which is beclouded by no limiting mystery. Life, which reaches to all the lengths and breadths and depths and heights of that spirit which God has made in the image of his own. Glory, which will meet and far surpass the loftiest desires and anticipations which have ever extorted from any of the elect spirits of our race the cry, "I beseech Thee, show me thy glory."

Tell us not, then, of jasper walls, or golden streets, or flashing jewels. These will no more suffice us than jewels will compensate the bride for the absence of her lord. We are set on attaining the glory to which God has called us in Jesus. And by his dear grace we shall attain it, too; for we have already received his grace, which is glory in the bud. Nor would our God mock us with the foretaste and earnest unless he were prepared to consummate all his grace with all his glory.

Oh, who will heed this call, which is yet sounding through the world, but which may soon cease? Surely the sons of men cannot realize what obedience to it involves. They think more of what they must give up than of what they are to receive. But if they would reverse this process, and think more of what they are certain to receive in Jesus Christ, methinks they would leave all else, without one anxious thought, in order to follow whither such delights entice.

2. OUR PATHWAY THITHER

"After that ye have suffered a little while."

Suffering, is inevitable. Through much tribulation we must pass to our reward on high. No cross, no crown; no Gethsemane, no emptied grave; no cup of sorrow, no chalice of joy; no cry of forsakenness, no portion with the great, or spoil with the strong. All who suffer are not necessarily glorified; but none are glorified who have not somehow suffered. We must drink of his cup, and be baptized with his baptism, if we would sit right and left of the King. The comet that stands longest nearest to the sun must have plunged furthest into the abyss.

Let sufferers take heart! If only their sufferings are not self-inflicted; if they do not result from their own mistakes and sins; if they arise from that necessary antagonism to sin and the present world into which close following of the Crucified must necessarily bring any one of us; if they are borne, not only submissively, but with the heart's choice, as of those that delight to do the will of God--then each pang is a milestone marking their way onwards to the goal of light and glory.

Suffering is necessary to our characters.--The Apostle does not for a moment wish his converts spared from the ordeal. Nothing short of necessity would ever lead God to expose us to the fire. But in no other way can our truest bliss be achieved. In no other school-house are the lessons of obedience so acquired as in that kept by Sorrow. The Lord Himself was once a scholar there, and carved his name on the hard and comfortless boards. In no other ordeal can we lose so much dross; drop so much chaff, learn so much of our own nothingness; be drawn so close to his companionship; or be taught such true estimates of the comparative value of things, weighing the present against the future, till we feel that it is not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed.

Suffering is limited.--At the most, it is for but a little while. Remember how often the Lord Jesus repeated the words, it is only "a little while" (John 16:16, 17, 18, 19). It was a note on which his fingers lingered, as if loath to leave it. Compared with all the future, the longest life of suffering is only for a moment; and, contrasted with the weight of glory, the heaviest trials are light. Let us not look at the things which are seen, but at those which are not seen. The hills which would daunt the traveller seem diminutive when they

are seen lying about the feet of some soaring Alp. Weeping can only stay for the brief summer night, and in the early twilight must hasten veiled away; because joy cometh in the morning, bringing the herald-beam of the long, happy summer day, on which night can never fall or draw her dusky veil.

When once that glory breaks upon us, the separations and misunderstandings and agonies of time will be no more remembered than a pin's prick is recalled by the soldier on the day of his public welcome and decoration.

And when we gain the shore at last, We shall not count the billows past.

3. OUR NURTURE IN THE DIVINE LIFE

All our hope must be in God. We are not to concern ourselves to cope with the difficulties of our growth in grace, or to fret about what seems to be our slow progress. If only we are willing, trustful, and obedient, God will make Himself responsible for all the rest.

"God shall Himself perfect, stablish, strengthen you" (1Peter 5:10)

He shall perfect--i.e., He shall put you in joint, so that his will may work through you, without let or hindrance; as the will of each human being operates consciously through any part of our marvellous nature.

He shall stablish--i.e., He shall found you so massively on the Rock of the person and work of the Lord Jesus, that when the rain descends, and the floods come, and the winds blow, and beat upon you, you may not fall, because rooted and grounded in Him.

He shall strengthen--i.e., He may not take away the suffering or the temptation, but He will give more grace, communicating his own strength; so that the soul may even glorify God for infirmity and trial, and say gladly: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

How safe and strong then may we be, if only we will go again and again to the God of all grace, claiming, with holy boldness, grace to help us in time of need; and believing that it is to us not according to our feeling but our faith! It is not probable that Elisha felt any different as he turned back from the chariot of fire, which had swept in between him and Elijah. He looked and felt as in the morning of that day; but a vast change had passed over him, which only awaited the River Jordan to call it forth into marvellous manifestation. So we may not be always conscious of the vast changes which are being gradually effected within us in answer to our faith; but when we approach the bank of some foaming river of difficulty or temptation, our behaviour and victory will open the lips of onlookers to exclaim, "Lo, God is here."

Let us give Him glory!

Do not hesitate to tell Him what you think of Him. Amid all the hatred, and blasphemy, and misunderstanding of his foes, let us blend voice and heart in ascribing to Him glory and dominion for ever and ever! Let the notes rise higher and higher as life climbs up towards its goal; until they are merged in the ocean of praise, the billows of which smite against his throne, breaking into the spray of a thousand songs! Thus may it be "for ever and ever." Amen.

THE END